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OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1990-91

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 194**

FIFTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 1 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Vale of Glamorgan Railway

1. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan railway line to passenger transport.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It is for British Rail to consider the case for reopening this line to passenger use.

Mr. Smith: The Minister will be pleased to hear that many of my constituents welcomed the recent statement by the Secretary of State for Transport about the new commitment and investment in rail transport and switching transport from road to rail. Is he aware that they welcomed the statement because they have suffered over the past few years from the familiar problems of traffic congestion, noise and pollution? The reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan freight line to passengers would solve that problem and provide a very attractive tourist magnet and a vital link to Cardiff-Wales airport. We welcome the statement and we hope that the Minister will ask the chairman at least to carry out a feasibility study for opening the line. I am afraid that some of my constituents are saying that it is all very well for the Government to make a statement, but they should put their money where their mouth is.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government put their money where their mouth is and that is why last week my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced the increase in funds available to British Rail. We need no lectures from the Labour party about the importance of British Rail. We have presided over a net opening of stations while the previous Labour Government presided over closures.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the chances of reopening the Vale of Glamorgan railway line would be considerably enhanced by the privatisation of British Rail? In that context, can he comment on the Government's progress in considering the possibilities of privatisation?

Mr. McLoughlin: An important part of the speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State not so long ago was our intention to end the monopoly under which British Rail runs on the railways. That will bring competition to the railways and it will be better for the future of British Rail and provide opportunities for new lines to be opened.

Freight Transport

2. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implementation of his objective of transferring more freight traffic from road to rail.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I recently announced an improved environmental grant scheme to help pay for rail freight facilities that will keep lorries off unsuitable roads. I plan in due course to end British Rail's monopoly by opening up the railways to other operators who want to provide rail freight services

and I am giving full support to BR's plans for channel tunnel rail freight services which will remove some 400,000 lorry journeys from our roads each year.

I am pleased today to announce that I have approved British Rail's investment in a further seven new locomotives for channel tunnel freight services, costing some £20 million.

Ms. Quin: Does the Secretary of State agree that the Government's objective of moving freight from road to rail will be meaningless without increased funding? Does he deplore British Rail's decision to refuse to allow a channel tunnel freight facility in the north-east of England? Will he take this opportunity publicly to express regret for the 12 years of wasted opportunity when the Government could have promoted the cause of the railways, but singularly failed to do so?

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail is authorising some £300 million of expenditure on freight services to service the channel tunnel. It is for BR to decide whether a particular freight terminal in the north-east is necessary. On the latter part of the hon. Lady's question, one recalls that investment in the railways fell during the previous Labour Government while it is higher today than at any time since Dr. Beeching.

Mr. Adley: While wholeheartedly welcoming the recent policy change announced by my right hon. and learned Friend and hoping that the thought is father unto the deed in respect of new investment in the railways, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to contemplate the proposition that our industrial competitors in the Community are running new stock on new railways while our investment goes into providing new stock for Victorian railways? Will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore look at what the west Germans are doing, particularly the government railway commission which was set up by Chancellor Kohl, and examine infrastructure and investment so that we can begin to get a level playing field for investment in roads compared with rail?

Mr. Rikfind: I am most interested in what is happening elsewhere in the European Community. I was particularly delighted that, at the previous meeting of the Council of Transport Ministers, the European Community accepted a British-inspired initiative which, for the first time, will ensure the opportunity for competition in the provision of international freight services throughout the Community. For the first time in our history it will be possible for British Rail operators to provide international freight services to other countries of the Community as a matter of right. I hope that the Opposition, who until now have preserved and been enamoured of British Rail's monopoly, will realise that Europe as a whole has rejected monopoly and is welcoming competition.

Mr. Prescott: How can the Secretary of State justify his recent statement about being enthusiastically and unequivocally in favour of the movement of freight from road to rail when this week he will be responsible for closing Speedlink to save £30 million, thereby putting many thousands of loads on to the roads, particularly the A1, and when he is about to spend £800 million to widen the A1 to deal with extra loads?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is characteristically wrong both in his facts and his interpretation. First, Speedlink is a decision for British Rail. Secondly, this year, it expects, on a total turnover of £45 million, a loss of about £40 million. If the hon. Gentleman would maintain a business with that sort of loss, it shows why he is unfit to be put in charge of the affairs of this country. Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman seems to be completely unaware that British Rail has already negotiated for more than half its Speedlink traffic to continue to be carried by rail by other means.

Mr. Harris: Although I accept my right hon. and learned Friend's latter point about Speedlink, does he agree that it seems to many of us that British Rail has almost deliberately run down its freight services, particularly in areas like mine in Cornwall? Over the weekend, for example, a haulier rang me about the closure of the Speedlink depot in Truro which serves a large part of Cornwall. Is not the British Rail approach to business summed up by the train on which I travelled from the west country today? It set off from Plymouth with only eight sandwiches in the refreshment car. Is not exactly that approach being applied in some other parts of British Rail's business, not least freight?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct in emphasising that there seem to be occasionally missed opportunities for British Rail, particularly in the west country which he represents. It is for such reasons that we are committed to ending British Rail's statutory monopoly in order that new rail operators, including Foster Yeoman in the west country, can provide the rail services, particularly rail freight services, that they believe to be necessary. It is a matter of great sadness that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and Mr. Jimmy Knapp appear to be the last two petrified fossils in Europe seeking to preserve that monopoly when all of Europe is now rejecting it.

Channel Tunnel Freight Terminal

4. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the case for a channel tunnel freight terminal in Greater Manchester.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): British Rail plans a channel tunnel freight terminal for 1992 in Greater Manchester, either at Trafford Park or Guide Bridge. A decision will be made shortly. For the longer term, British Rail is examining the feasibility of establishing a freight terminal on a greenfield site in the north-west, with good motorway connections.

Mr. Bennett: May I urge the Minister to use his offices to persuade British Rail to pick the Guide Bridge site on the edge of my constituency? It is an extremely large site and it would be very good for picking up freight in Greater Manchester and transferring it to rail to go across Europe. British Rail has examined the site, but has taken a long time to decide on it; and it is a matter of great regret that it has not announced a decision to go ahead at Guide Bridge straight away so that hauliers in Greater Manchester can start to plan for that. It will also have excellent motorway links by the time it opens.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for supporting British Rail's concept of trying to develop combined transport—freight delivered by road within a fairly narrowly defined area to a rail terminal for onward

shipping to other parts of the country and through the channel tunnel. I shall pass on his concerns to British Rail and tell it of his support for the idea of a new freight terminal.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend speed up British Rail's granting of freight terminals in Greater Manchester and the rest of the north-west? Inward and various other north-west industrial organisations urged the previous Secretary of State for Transport to use his good offices to get the chairman of British Rail to make a decision. We must plan for the future; the tunnel will be open in 1993 and we have not reached the starting point for our freight. For areas on the periphery of the tunnel, connection to the continent is important so that we can deliver our exports quickly and speedily.

Mr. Freeman: As my hon. Friend knows, of the nine sites for channel tunnel freight terminal business, six have already been announced and three have yet to be specified —Merseyside, Manchester and the Strathclyde-Glasgow area. I intend to visit the north-west shortly and I am confident that British Rail will have made a decision before I go.

Pedestrian Accidents

5. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many pedestrians are killed or injured each day; and what steps he is taking to reduce the numbers.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): The provisional figures for the first three months of this year show that the average number of pedestrians killed or injured each day was 142, a reduction of about one fifth compared with the same period in 1990.

Mr. French: Does my hon. Friend accept that a group of pedestrians who put themselves at unnecessary risk are those who weave in and out of traffic at major crossroads plying their services as washers of windscreens? Is not there something that my hon. Friend could do to stop it?

Mr. Chope: The best solution is for drivers of vehicles to wash their windscreens before they embark on their journeys—that would put those people out of business. But there is a more serious issue to do with pedestrian safety——

Mr. Prescott: It is free enterprise.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but this is indeed what free enterprise is all about. If there is no demand for a service there will be no opportunity to make money from it. I suggest that if people cleaned their windscreens before setting out on their journeys there would be no business for those who obstruct traffic in this way.

Mr. Fearn: Is the Minister aware that the number of child deaths and injuries is causing great concern to many road safety organisations? Will he launch a nationwide campaign to get the figures down?

Mr. Chope: I am pleased to say that in the first three months of this year the number of child fatalities among pedestrians fell by one third. That is jolly good progress.

Mr. Gregory: Will my hon. Friend hold urgent discussions with the Home Secretary about the prosecution of cyclists who cycle on pavements, especially taking into account the case of four-year-old Abbie-Gail Copley, who came out of her house last week in Chapelfields road, York, and was knocked down by a cyclist, following which she required more than 20 stitches in her face? Sad to say, North Yorkshire police have taken no action. Will my hon. Friend discuss such cases urgently with the Home Secretary so that cyclists know the state of the law?

Mr. Chope: I doubt whether there is any dispute about the state of the law. It is not ignorance of the law that is causing a number of cyclists to behave in an anti-social and dangerous manner. Enforcement of the law must be a matter for the police.

Miss Hoey: Although I welcome the reduction in the number of pedestrian deaths, does the Minister accept that many of these deaths are due to fast driving, particularly in built-up city areas? Does he also accept that something more should be done to reduce the speed of cars in our inner cities and, where drivers are going faster than they should, to ensure that they are prosecuted so that elderly people in particular are able to walk about, feeling safe on the pavements?

Mr. Chope: There is much sense in what the hon. Lady says. The Government are in favour of traffic-calming measures in urban areas and we have introduced a power for local authorities to impose 20 mph zones. All that is lacking is the will on the part of some local authorities to take the necessary action.

Humber Bridge

6. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimate he has as to the current level of debt being carried by the Humber bridge board.

Mr. Chope: The debt on the Humber bridge at 31 March this year was just over £400 million. Since 1986, we have accepted that the bridge is an exceptional case. My right hon. and learned Friend is writing to the chairman of the bridge board to propose a package for writing off and suspending those parts of the debt that cannot be financed from toll charges. Some debt will remain to be serviced from toll revenues. I shall introduce at an early opportunity the necessary legislative measures to give effect to the arrangements.

Mr. Cran: Has not this saga gone on long enough? As my hon. Friend has admitted that this is a special case, will he be reasonably clear about when the Government will make an announcement about a partial debt write-off? I say that reluctantly, but I have had to reach that conclusion because my hon. Friend knows as well as I do that the income from the bridge does not even meet the interest payments, let alone the amount necessary to write off capital.

Mr. Chope: I accept that that is the problem and that is why I have just made my announcement. I cannot be more specific until we know exactly when we can bring in the legislative measures. It will then be necessary to calculate what amount of debt has to be written off to make sure that the toll charges are bearable.

High-speed Rail Link

8. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on British Rail's proposals for a high-speed rail link through Kent.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government are considering British Rail's report on the options for the rail link.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that four of the proposed routes for the high-speed rail link go across my constituency. For three years, local residents have had to put up with agony and anxiety as British Rail has blundered forward with its plans. In coming to a conclusion, will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the fact that we in north-west Kent have nothing to gain in transport terms from a high-speed rail link and everything to lose in terms of our environment?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand my hon. Friend's concern and they will be taken into account in considering the recommendations of British Rail which I received just over four weeks ago. I emphasise that not only has British Rail already commissioned considerable environmental assessment studies of the various route options, but that whichever option might be chosen as the preferred route will be subject to a full environmental impact assessment with the proper opportunity for public consultation and comment.

Mr. Prescott: As the Secretary of State is aware, the London channel tunnel group, which wishes to pressure him to make a decision, is here to lobby Parliament. Therefore, will he tell us whether he will make a statement before the House rises for the summer recess? Will the Secretary of State make a decision on the Government's view before the full environmental assessment study on one or both routes?

Mr. Rifkind: I cannot give the precise timing of any Government decision on the preferred route. British Rail has asked us to say whether we can agree what the preferred route should be, so that it can go ahead with a full environmental impact assessment of whichever route might be chosen. That is the basis on which we are approaching these matters.

Mr. Sims: My right hon. and learned Friend said that he received the report four weeks ago, but he answered the question to the effect that he received it on 3 May, nearly two months ago. *[Interruption.]* That is what he said in reply to the question. Does he appreciate that although he said that early publication would cause blight to properties along the route, such blight has existed for some years and continues? Bearing in mind the fact that, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said, the London channel tunnel group is here lobbying the House today, urging for publication of the proposals so as to remove uncertainty, speculation and rumours, will he seriously consider publishing the proposals? My right hon. and learned Friend has already said that he will not show a preference, but only publish them. Will he please do it so that we all know where we stand?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall clarify the position to ensure that my hon. Friend is not misled. If we were to publish all four routes now that would cause considerable unnecessary concern to many people. The preferable course of action is for the Government to consider the recommendations that British Rail has put to us and to come to a judgment on the preferred route—the route on which a proper environmental impact assessment should take place. That is what we are working on at the moment and I intend to report to the House on those matters as soon as I can.

Fishing Vessels (Safety)

9. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to meet representatives of the catching sector of the fishing industry in order to discuss matters relating to the occupational safety of the crews of United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend met representatives of the Scottish fishing industry on 24 April. There is a regular dialogue with the fishing industry on all aspects of safety, including the occupational safety of crews, at the twice-yearly meetings of the fishing industry safety group.

Dr. Godman: The circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Antares aroused deep distress and considerable anger throughout Scotland's fishing communities. I believe that the Minister is aware that the Royal Navy has published its report into the sinking of that vessel. When will his Department publish its report? Has the Minister received any suggestion from the Lord Advocate's office that a fatal accident inquiry will be held? Does he agree that the families of the four men who were drowned in that tragic collision between the submarine and the fishing boat deserve substantial compensation? Presumably that compensation will not be paid until his Department has published its report and a fatal accident inquiry has been held. Has the Minister any information about that inquiry?

Mr. McLoughlin: As the hon. Gentleman said, the question whether there should be a fatal accident inquiry is a matter for the Lord Advocate and specific questions about establishing such an inquiry should properly be directed to him.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, last week my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced a major extension of the monitoring scheme, operated through the coastguard, which records where submarines are operating. That extension was warmly welcomed by the fishing industry. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must do all that we can to ensure that accidents such as that involving the Antares do not happen again.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my hon. Friend accept that there is considerable relief in the United Kingdom fishing community at the retention of the Decca navigation system? That community would have faced substantially increased costs had the Loran C system been adopted in place of the Decca system.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right that strong representations were made by the Scottish fishing industry to my right hon. and learned Friend at the meeting to which I referred. We took account of those representations as well as of the fact that, in the end, we received a far better offer from Decca which made us able to switch back to that system. It is worth pointing

out that it is only in the United Kingdom where the user pays. It is important that, when we agree on negotiations, the user pays as little as possible, but gets a good system.

Ms. Walley: Is the Minister also aware that there is widespread growing alarm at the number of tragic accidents involving the loss of fishing vessels and their crew? I am talking particularly about the Pescado and the Wilhelmina J. When will the Minister give me a full answer to my letter to him of 30 April? When will he give us the real details that were exposed in an article in the *Daily Mirror* last Thursday? The Minister must tell the House when we can expect the full Department of Transport report into the Wilhelmina J tragedy to be made public. Why will not the Minister agree to our demand for a public inquiry about shipping safety and for tougher safety regulations to cover flag of convenience shipping?

Mr. McLoughlin: It seems that in response to the hon. Lady's supplementary question we must go over ground that has been trodden in the past. Losses of fishing vessels between 1975 and 1979 were far in excess of the losses of the past five years. I am sure that no one in this place disagrees that safety is extremely important. The sinking of the Wilhelmina J is still being considered by the Department's legal advisers. I should like to be able publicly to issue a bulletin, but I am unable to do so because an injunction has been served against the Department. The document was given to various relatives and others involved and it has now fallen into the hands of the press. The situation is not acceptable and I am considering the way in which the regulations are framed to ascertain whether an amendment is necessary to enable me to publish the document.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Given the important responsibilities of the Department of Transport to ensure the safety of fishermen, has the Department undertaken any review of its system of discussing with the Department of Energy and the Ministry of Defence such matters as the Antares disaster and the difficulties that fishermen face as a result of debris being left in the North sea by those engaged in the oil industry? Is any specific mechanism being established, or does the Department of Transport just wait for other Departments to initiate discussions?

Mr. McLoughlin: Not at all. There are regular discussions between all Departments on matters that concern fishermen. Today my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced an increase in the area that is covered by the submarine notice. I think that that announcement was warmly welcomed by the fishing industry in Scotland.

Freight Transport

10. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that plans for freight movement on the channel tunnel rail link will be on United Kingdom wagons which are compatible with the gauge of continental tracks.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail plans to use freight wagons on channel tunnel services which will be compatible with both United Kingdom and continental loading gauges.

Mr. Bowden: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the alternative proposals to that of British Rail is to make provision for a dedicated freight route with a track and wagon gauge that would be fully compatible with European gauges, which I think British Rail's are not?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend is well aware that the Ove Arup proposal includes some facility for freight to pass along its railway lines. I can assure my hon. Friend that in deciding upon a preferred route and then making an announcement on the route for the new rail link, both British Rail and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will consider whether the existing arrangements—small-wheeled bogies, special wagons and the use of the existing railway lines—are consistent with a proper international freight service by the end of the decade.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister pay careful attention to what the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) said, which was absolutely right? No amount of waffle from the Government Front Bench will compensate for what the Government are not doing for the railway system. If the Minister wants freight to be moved on our railways instead of on our roads, he should announce that continental loading gauges and freight wagons will be able to come into the United Kingdom on a dedicated track from Folkestone to Dover and then up to the midlands and on to the north-east and the north-west. Anything less from the Minister will not do.

Mr. Freeman: To convert British Rail's tracks to continental gauge throughout the country would cost many billions of pounds, and there is no prospect of that happening. From 1993, when the channel tunnel opens, onwards, British Rail and the other railway operators are planning to use special wagons—low-wheeled bogied wagons—that will be able to travel on both European and British gauges. That will provide a freight service that will meet demand from 1993 onwards. In the longer term, as I made clear in answer to the supplementary question by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), we shall consider whether these arrangements are adequate for the services needed for international freight at the end of the decade.

Mr. Wolfson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that long-term planning features in the decision that is made on both freight and passenger traffic? Is my hon. Friend aware that if Britain's system is not compatible with the European system, we shall put ourselves at a long-term disadvantage in both the passenger and freight sectors? Does he further agree that there is a danger even now of Britain being described, sometimes in despair, by SNCF people as "branch-line" Britain? That we cannot have.

Mr. Freeman: This Conservative Government believe strongly in long-term planning—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) may laugh, but he conveniently forgets that we have a 15-year, long-term construction programme for London Underground and a road building programme stretching over a comparable period.

Following a statement that my right hon. and learned Friend hopes to make in due course about a rail link, we will have a railway building programme that will provide a long-term plan for Britain's railway system. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) is right

to say that we need a first-class freight system to take freight between this country and the continent, and we shall have it.

Ms. Ruddock: Can the Minister confirm that the Ove Arup proposal studied by British Rail and W. S. Atkins was for a two-tier railway that could be used for both passengers and freight, and which would be built to the higher European standard gauge? Does he accept that the public are aware of the routes that are being considered? As his right hon. and learned Friend refuses to say that he will make up his mind before the summer recess, will the Government acknowledge the public interest in this matter and publish the reports at the end of this parliamentary Session?

Mr. Freeman: Not only is there great public interest in a new rail link, but my right hon. and learned Friend and the Government are paying a great deal of attention to what is a most important project. We need a new rail link between Dover and London primarily to cope with passengers. We must deal with the increase in the expected number of international passengers and the growth in commuter service demand in the south-east. Freight is important, but in the short term, from 1993, it will travel on existing lines and with the new technology, to which I referred earlier.

Sir Anthony Durant: When considering freight movement following the building of the channel tunnel, will my hon. Friend and British Rail reconsider the possibility of a freight terminal at Reading? I assure him that there is a great deal of support for that.

Mr. Freeman: I shall certainly convey my hon. Friend's view to British Rail. It is for BR, rather than for Ministers, to decide where freight terminals should be located. Ministers' responsibility is to ensure that British Rail has a policy and gets on with it.

West Yorkshire Rail Electrification

11. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the future of the West Yorkshire rail electrification scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: As I said in my reply to the hon. Member on 18 June, credit approvals are reserved for the infrastructure costs of the West Yorkshire rail electrification scheme. We shall consider resources for rolling stock as a matter of urgency when decisions are taken on the allocation of credit approvals for 1992-93.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm that his Department remains committed to the electrification scheme and recognises the importance of retaining Bradford as part of the InterCity network, the need to encourage more people to use local trains, and the importance of electrification to jobs and the expansion of the local economy? It will be very much regretted that he has been unable today to confirm that the scheme—all parts of it—will proceed immediately. We recognise the dead hand of the Treasury behind the dither and delay. Will the Minister give an early sign that a green light will be given to the scheme so that it can go ahead without any further delay?

Mr. McLoughlin: Unlike the Opposition, the Government have to find the money that they commit themselves to spending. However, I hope that the electrification project can go ahead next year.

Mr. Waller: Is my hon. Friend aware of the considerable significance that people, not only in Bradford but Airedale and Wharfedale, attach to that scheme, which would more than better the 8 per cent. return on capital that the Treasury requires? Will my hon. Friend bear it in mind that unless West Yorkshire passenger transport executive can order soon the rolling stock to run on its splendid new electrified lines, its price may rise—which might place that 8 per cent. return in jeopardy?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am well aware of that problem, and I stand by my statement that I hope that the project can get the go-ahead next year.

New Railways

12. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to permit new railway operations.

Mr. Freeman: As my right hon. and learned Friend said earlier, we propose to give private-sector operators a right of access to British Rail's track. We are considering the details of how to do that, but legislation will be needed.

Mr. Butler: The north-west rail users' group believes that the Liverpool to north Wales line could be a commercial proposition, but apparently British Rail does not share that view. Will my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals allow a commercial operator to prove British Rail wrong?

Mr. Freeman: The answer is yes. Meanwhile, before primary legislation can be presented to the House to permit such a commercial venture, all propositions involving private sector finance are welcome, and British Rail and my right hon. and learned Friend will study any such proposals.

THE ARTS

New Opera House

27. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will consider funding the building of a new opera house in London.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): London already has two large-scale opera houses and an increasing range of other places in which opera is performed. Much as I might personally welcome it, I see no need for a further opera house.

Mr. Fraser: Although one would not expect a Tory Government to emulate a French socialist President, will the Minister confirm that Covent Garden's subsidy averages about £40 per seat per performance? Nevertheless, when great stars appear at Covent Garden, few ordinary people can see their performances because of business subscriptions and the prior claim to seats that many other people have. Does the Minister agree that there is a case to be made for staging productions with

world-famous stars at a much bigger auditorium, so that the benefits of subsidy can be enjoyed by a much larger number of people?

Mr. Renton: Despite the fact that the French have just built a new opera house, there are many more opera performances in London than in Paris. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a need to present opera to a wider audience, which is why I am happy that a number of groups, such as Opera 80, Opera Factory, and Mecklenburgh Opera, perform in small theatres throughout London. The Royal Opera house has reduced the proportion of its income that is derived from subsidy from 53 per cent. five years ago to 37 per cent. now. It also plans to stage at Kenwood and in the piazza outside Covent Garden popular productions that will be seen by many thousands of people.

Mr. Dicks: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that as no one would attend the opera unless it was subsidised from the public purse, even contemplating the building of a new opera house would place another millstone around the taxpayers' neck?

Mr. Renton: I am bound to remind my hon. Friend that when the Royal Opera house stages and records "Carmen" in the open air in the piazza, there will be no direct cost to the taxpayer. I hope that my hon. Friend himself will take the opportunity to sample the delights of "Carmen".

Mr. Fisher: Most right hon. and hon. Members, although perhaps not all, will have been disappointed by the Minister's reply to the original question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). Will the Minister consider two related points? First, English National Opera's lease on the London Coliseum expires in 1996, when it will be the only national company without a permanent home. Secondly, the London Coliseum and other great cultural buildings incur high maintenance costs. The Minister will know that the Tate, for example, has holes in its roof and needs to spend £27 million, and that the national gallery, where the new Sainsbury wing is to open tomorrow, needs £20 million spent on it. Is not that an appalling indictment of 12 years of Government incompetence and neglect? Does the Minister have a policy, and what does he intend to do about the English National Opera's lease and our great cultural buildings?

Mr. Renton: I am well aware that English National Opera's lease expires in 1996. The Arts Council, others and I are in negotiation with the owners of the lease to find out on what terms it might be continued so that ENO can continue the great run of successes that it has had at the Coliseum. As regards the wider question raised by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) Labour's arts policy on such difficult issues has the size and originality of a postage stamp. I wrote an article in Saturday's *The Daily Telegraph* about encouraging business sponsorship of the arts. What do I find? Most of my arguments were repeated by the hon. Gentleman in *The Mail on Sunday* yesterday, bringing to mind the old saying of Tom Lehrer,

"Plagiarise, plagiarise, let nothing evade your eyes."

Symphony Concerts

28. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many symphony concerts by symphony orchestras or sinfoniettas receiving publicly funded support took place in London in June.

Mr. Renton: I do not have information on the number of concerts funded by local government, but I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that 46 concerts were given by symphony orchestras, sinfonietta and chamber orchestras in London in June with Arts Council support.

Mr. Jessel: Does not that excellent figure of 46 reflect a superb range of concerts of great breadth and diversity and, as the BBC Promenade concert season is about to begin, reinforce London as the music capital of the world? Is not the figure noticeably better than that for Paris where there are larger subsidies?

Mr. Renton: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, as I am sure does the whole House. He makes his point—dare I say it—on a high note. I congratulate him on behalf of the whole House on the fact that he has just been appointed to the Council of the Association of British Orchestras. There he will doubtless continue clearly to make his point about the success of London as a centre for music.

Regional Arts Boards

29. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what progress has been made in setting up the new regional arts boards.

Mr. Renton: I am delighted to report that good progress has been made. Eight chairmen and one chairwoman have been appointed to nine of the 10 new boards, and the remaining board members have been, or are, in the process of being appointed.

All the new boards now have chief executives, and a start has been made on recruiting other members of staff. The new boards are, therefore, firmly on target to be fully operational by 1 October this year.

Mr. King: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, which shows great progress towards the establishment of a more cost-effective form of administrating the arts. Would he care to tell the House about the sort of savings that he might envisage as a result of doing away with a centralised bureaucratic structure and replacing it with a more clearly identifiable regional structure?

Mr. Renton: Yes, I am hoping that in the first stage of reorganisation there will be savings by 1993 on an annual basis of at least £1 million. All that money will then be available to go to arts companies, rather than to be spent on administration. That is a significant amount and I shall look for further savings once the new regional arts boards are fully in place and we can tell how the integrated structure between them and the Arts Council at the centre works out.

Mr. Maclennan: Can the Minister say how near he is to knowing which clients are to be retained by the Arts Council and which are to go to the regional arts boards? When does he expect that to be sorted out?

Mr. Renton: An initial list of delegated clients—as the phrase is—was announced by the Arts Council with my

agreement a month or two ago. There will be no further delegations until the autumn of next year. Then, when the new national arts strategy has been delivered to me by the Arts Council, I shall take further decisions about the delegation of those companies that remain with the Arts Council.

Amateur Theatre

30. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what measures he intends to take to promote amateur theatre in the regions.

Mr. Renton: Amateur theatre is traditionally self-reliant. In the past 25 years or so there has been a sustained growth in amateur theatre, which has been encouraged by the regional arts association network and local authorities.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend have a word with North West Arts to find out whether it can get together with Warrington borough council to find a new home for the Centenary theatre group in Warrington which has been displaced out of Crosfields?

Mr. Renton: I am sorry to hear of that difficulty. Amateur theatre and the arts generally play a vital role in arts provision in all areas, including places with limited access to professional work. I have already taken up with the Arts Council the question of that little company and I am glad to say that the Arts Board: North West will be writing to my hon. Friend today to tell him what steps it proposes to take.

Grants (North-West)

31. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what proportion of the Arts Council grant in 1991-92 has been allocated to the north-west of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Arts Council grant to Merseyside Arts and North West Arts and its own estimated direct spending in the region amount to nearly £9·5 million. This represents 4·9 per cent. of the total Arts Council grant.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the importance of the Arts Council grant to many of the cultural activities of the north-west. It is especially important to our orchestras, such as the Hallé and the Royal Liverpool philharmonic. Has my right hon. Friend any plans to assist the Royal Liverpool philharmonic with its ambitious project to expand and with its original costs, incurred by its taking over a new building in the centre of Liverpool?

Mr. Renton: I have met the chairman of the Hallé, and I know about its ambition to have its own concern hall in Manchester. That will require a good deal of money, but I hope that it will manage to raise considerable sponsorship, together with some support from the Arts Council. The appeal for the Royal Liverpool philharmonic is going well. I was delighted to be able to launch it some months ago. I hope that the Royal Liverpool philharmonic will soon have a redecorated home, and that the Hallé will have a new one.

Poetry

32. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet the chairman of the Arts Council to discuss support for poetry.

Mr. Renton: I meet the chairman of the Arts Council regularly for discussions on a range of subjects.

Mr. Wilson: When the Minister next meets the Arts Council chairman, will he discuss with him the threat to the existence of the magazine *Aquarius*, which is published by Mr. Eddie Linden? This small poetry magazine requires very little financial support, although it has been a breeding ground for many a poet who has proceeded to become eminent and successful. Will the Minister arrange with the Arts Council chairman for an application for support to be made?

Mr. Renton: I am well aware of the hon. Gentleman's interest in this subject and in the literary magazine in question. I assure him that the Arts Council provides help for literary magazines—usually as a one-off, as it prefers to avoid long-term commitments. I understand that no approach has yet been made to the Arts Council about *Aquarius*, but, if such an approach is made, the Arts Council will certainly consider whether it can give the magazine reasonable assistance.

CIVIL SERVICE

Book Manuscripts (Vetting)

36. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many manuscripts of books have been submitted for vetting by the head of the civil service in the last two years; and if he will list the authors.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): In the past two years 10 authors have submitted manuscripts to the head of the home civil service under the guidelines of the Radcliffe report. Those whose books have so far been published include the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey); my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie); my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler); Lord Young of Graffham; Sir Alec Cairncross; Sir Bernard Ingham and Mr. Edmund Dell. Three others have submitted manuscripts but have not yet had their books published.

Mr. Banks: There are quite a few literary gems there. Is not the vetting procedure a bit of a nonsense? It has far more to do with preventing potential Government embarrassment than with protecting national security. Most ministerial memoirs—although not, of course, the book by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey)—are selective, impenetrable and tedious.

Would it not be far better if we scrapped the whole procedure and adopted a free system, so that everyone could be given the truth? I doubt whether, when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) writes her memoirs—no doubt they will be called "We Did It Our Way", or something of the kind—we shall read the truth about the Belgrano or Westland. Why do we not get away from all this rubbish? Ministers rarely tell us the truth in retrospect.

Mr. Renton: I am sure that the whole House will await the memoirs of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) with eager interest. I hope, however, that he will show rather more loyalty to his Front-Bench colleagues than did Barbara Castle. According to her memoirs, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was ticked off by Lord Callaghan for serving the Prime Minister and not the whole Cabinet. Apparently, Lord Callaghan said:

"Another of Harold's failures is that he has done nothing to reform the Civil Service, and merely comforted himself by surrounding himself with comics like Gerald Kaufman."

I assume that, whether or not he submits his memoirs to the Radcliffe committee rules, the hon. Gentleman will be rather more loyal to the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Aitken: Will my right hon. Friend be candid enough to admit that the vetting procedure is becoming a charade, partly because civil service vetters are incapable of distinguishing between security and embarrassment and partly because there are no sanctions against those who defy the suggestions of the vetting office? Is he aware that at least one ministerial author, whose memoirs will be published shortly, has taken no notice of the cuts that were suggested? Will he be taken off to the Tower of London when the book is published?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend well knows that there are no sanctions, but I must disagree with him: the system, which is voluntary, has worked well. Sir Bernard Ingham submitted his memoirs to the Cabinet Secretary and made all the changes that the Radcliffe rules require. It is better to have a voluntary system than a compulsory one, and by and large it works reasonably well.

Mr. Benn: Is the Minister aware that the Prime Minister has prohibited the publication of the evidence that I submitted to the Select Committee on Members' Interests, which contained the instructions that Mr. Callaghan gave Ministers about private financial interests? I have heard today from the Chairman of the Select Committee that, for that reason, he will not publish my evidence. Is he aware that, in the circumstances, I intend to publish it myself?

Mr. Renton: I am interested to hear the right hon. Gentleman say that. Whether his decision is right, and whether he can justify it to himself, it follows in the tradition that he has followed in the past. In his memoirs Against the Tide", he said:

"when my civil servants turn up with a letter to undermine another Minister, I tear it up . . . That's more than can be said of other Ministers."

I think that he is probably following the same path of slightly idiosyncratic rebellion that he followed when he was a Minister in the Labour Cabinet.

Next Steps Agencies

37. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what improvements in customer service have been brought about by the creation of next steps agencies.

Mr. Renton: Improving the quality of customer service is one of the prime aims of next steps, and agencies are given targets for that. To quote but two of the many examples, the Meteorological Office's "Weather Initiative" provided umbrella retailers and manufacturers with advance information on the likelihood of last week's rain so that they could plan their production and distribution accordingly. The Driver Standards Agency has reduced waiting times for driving tests, and in order to promote road safety, examiners will now explain faults made by learners.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's reply. Does he agree that the next steps agencies will help to improve service to all consumers?

Mr. Renton: I have no doubt that one of the main purposes of the next steps agencies is to give greater customer satisfaction, which will be achieved only by providing better service.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister believe that one of the improvements in customer services as a result of setting up the agencies should be that applicants for income support should automatically be assessed for any other grant or benefit that may be available to them?

Mr. Renton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have been over this before. As I said, it is for the Secretary of State involved and the agency's chief executive to set the performance targets that he expects the chief executive to meet. If the hon. Gentleman would like to take this matter up with the Secretary of State for Social Security and the chief executive of the agency, I am sure that they will carefully consider his suggestion.

European Community Institutions

38. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what steps he is taking to increase the number of United Kingdom secondees to European Community institutions.

Mr. Renton: My Department has been spearheading a drive to increase the number of United Kingdom secondees to the European Community institutions. Since April 1990, the number of United Kingdom secondees has increased from 63 to more than 100.

Mr. Carrington: That increase is highly welcome. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the number of secondees and their seniority play a vital role in ensuring that the United Kingdom's interests are well represented at the formulation of policy in EC institutions?

Mr. Renton: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. Secondments to the EC are an effective way of increasing our influence in the institutions. When secondees return to Whitehall, they bring back valuable experience which will be helpful in their Departments' dealings with the EC.

Disabled People

39. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the civil service trade unions to discuss opportunities for people with disabilities.

Mr. Renton: I meet representatives of the civil service trade unions from time to time to discuss a variety of issues. They have not raised opportunities for people with disabilities with me, but my staff have regular meetings with them on this issue and keep me informed of progress.

Mr. Barnes: Does the Minister agree that people with disabilities have a great deal to offer in many places, including the civil service? Many have acquired

considerable skills in tackling their disabilities, which means that they would be of great benefit operating fully in the civil service. If there is anywhere that should provide open access and should not be biased against disabled people, it is the civil service.

Mr. Renton: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. He will be pleased to know that my staff have, for example, arranged exhibitions of special equipment in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff that will help employ those with disabilities. The civil service employs 7,900 disabled staff —a slightly higher percentage of registered disabled people than in the work force generally.

Press Secretaries

40. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is the number of press secretaries currently working for Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Renton: There are only two posts in Whitehall which carry the title press secretary. These are in the Prime Minister's Office and the Treasury. In addition, there are eight with the title director of information, one chief of public relations and 10 heads of information in other Whitehall Departments.

Mr. Wilson: In view of the challenge of explaining Majorism to the multitude, does the right hon. Gentleman think that that is enough?

Mr. Renton: I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be able to explain his policies to the admiring British public without the need for any press secretary.

European Council (Luxembourg)

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the European Council in Luxembourg on 28 and 29 June. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the United Kingdom.

It was clear from the events there that Yugoslavia must be the first item on our agenda. I discussed the overnight position with Prime Minister Lubbers and with Chancellor Kohl before the Council opened. We were able to reach rapid agreement in the Council on invoking the emergency mechanisms of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe and a meeting is taking place in Vienna this afternoon.

We also agreed to dispatch to Yugoslavia the Foreign Ministers of the troika—Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy. Their visit brought some respite in the conflict, but the situation was very fragile yesterday and the Foreign Ministers returned to Yugoslavia yesterday afternoon. They secured agreement to the appointment of Mr. Mesic of Croatia as the next President of Yugoslavia and to other measures to defuse the crisis. The situation remains very volatile and the Community will need to be closely involved over the coming weeks. In the meantime, Community aid to Yugoslavia has been suspended. British citizens have been advised to leave Slovenia.

The main item of scheduled business was to discuss progress in the two intergovernmental conferences launched last year, one on economic and monetary union and the other on political union. Discussion centred on the issues raised in a draft treaty text circulated by the presidency, though there was no detailed negotiation of the text itself.

This European Council—as we had wanted—was a stocktaking. It was not the occasion to take decisions, but we have registered the considerable progress made in the Luxembourg presidency as well as our collective will to reach an agreement at Maastricht in December.

The conclusions, which have been placed in the Library of the House, incorporate a number of points of importance to the United Kingdom. I made it clear that I welcomed the structure of the present draft of the treaty, although some other partners in the Community disagree with it strongly. The present text means that some things are done on the basis of the treaty of Rome but others on the basis of intergovernmental action in which the treaty of Rome does not apply and the Commission does not have the sole right of initiative.

I welcomed the concept of a common foreign and security policy set firmly within the context of the Atlantic alliance and stressed the need to work by consensus in this crucial area.

There is agreement on the preparation of proposals to improve the implementation of Community law. That reflects a British proposal that would enable the European Court of Justice to fine member states that fail to comply with Community legislation. We have long argued for a level playing field and for full respect of the rule of law, and we are determined to get it. We have a good record on implementation and we believe that all states that sign up to Community law should implement it.

The conclusions call for early progress on the remaining legislation needed to complete the single market. This means in particular measures on insurance, and air, sea and road transport, which are of importance to this country.

The Council discussed the need to strengthen the Community's external perimeter boundary if free movement of people is to be able to take place within it. We also agreed to better co-ordination in the fight against international drug trafficking and organised crime through the establishment of a European Criminal Investigation Office.

The conclusions also commit us to strengthening the Community's links with the countries of central and eastern Europe. This will initially take the form of association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Government hope that those countries—and probably others—will be ready for full membership in due course.

I also made it clear that there were things in the present draft treaty with which I could not agree, and it was understood that nothing could be agreed until everything is agreed at the conclusion of these discussions. I explained that even though to many federal union implies decentralisation, the term carried the reverse implication in this country and would not be acceptable in a text to be agreed at the end of the year.

I explained our reservations about the existing text on the role of the European Parliament. We see a strong case for an increased role for the European Parliament in areas such as control over the Commission through audit of expenditure and measures to safeguard the rights of Community citizens, including the appointment of a European ombudsman. The text entirely reserves our position on the issue of co-decision. The present proposal, involving a complicated conciliation procedure, would not in our view improve Community decision-taking.

In the discussion on economic and monetary union I maintained our reserve on a single currency and a single central bank. We discussed the issue of economic convergence. The need for such convergence is increasingly recognised by our partners, but the nature and extent of that convergence and its relationship with possible target dates for moves to stages 2 and 3 of economic and monetary union are still for negotiation. All other member states understand that there must, in any case, be a separate decision by the Government and this House on whether the United Kingdom would move to a single currency and, if so, when.

The European Council has issued a number of political declarations which are also available in the Library of the House.

The Council endorsed the initiative that I took in April to establish a United Nations register of conventional arms transfers, and we will together table a draft resolution on this at the United Nations General Assembly.

The Council also endorsed a British and German initiative to improve the co-ordination of disaster relief within the United Nations system. We envisage the appointment of a high-level co-ordinator, with direct access to emergency funding and with the authority to pull together the whole disaster relief operation. We are taking that initiative forward in the United Nations now.

At British initiative, the Council agreed a text on human rights, the first such declaration ever adopted by the European Council. The Community will use its

[The Prime Minister]

leverage to promote human rights through the economic and co-operation agreements which it makes with third countries.

We welcomed the abolition in South Africa of the remaining legislative pillars of apartheid. We also declared our support for the renewal of sporting links with South Africa on a case-by-case basis where unified and non-racial sporting bodies have been set up. The establishment of such an independent and non-racial body for cricket was announced on the same day.

I believe that this European Council was a good example of the Community at work. We took rapid action to respond to the crisis in Yugoslavia and will continue to work together for a peaceful settlement. We took stock in a businesslike way of the progress made under Luxembourg's chairmanship. There are difficult issues still to be resolved. As in any negotiation, there will have to be give and take and a judgment will have to be made by the Government and by the House on the overall package at the end of the negotiation. There was a common determination in Luxembourg to work for an agreed outcome to the negotiations by the end of the year. I shall continue to argue for what I believe to be in the interests of our own country and the interests of the Community as a whole.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his statement. I begin by expressing my strong support for the initiatives taken by the European Council to try to achieve stability, a secure ceasefire and productive discussions in Yugoslavia. I also express the hope that the efforts will be continued and that all the agencies of the Community and of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe will be employed in trying to secure a speedy, peaceful and enduring outcome to the turmoil and divisions in Yugoslavia.

Clearly, for our generation, there are no "small countries far away of which we know little". The Council is therefore to be commended on the speed and thoroughness of its action, which demonstrated how necessary and how possible it is to act as a Community in dealing with the security of our continent. Can the Prime Minister confirm that arrangements to assist British citizens wishing to leave Slovenia are proceeding satisfactorily as the day goes on?

With regard to the discussions on the two intergovernmental conferences, does the Prime Minister agree with me that the negotiations are of supreme importance to the future of our country and that any Government's overriding objective must therefore be the national interest, both for our generation and for future generations? That being the case, may I first say to the Prime Minister that there are no foreseeable circumstances in which it would be beneficial for the European Community to take on responsibility for military defence matters?

Secondly, would the Prime Minister accept, as a matter of principle, the requirement that any economic or political institutions established to share power at European Community level must be democratically accountable—because only democracy is truly robust and also because the powers already ceded by national Parliaments must continue to be subject to democratic control?

Thirdly, will the Prime Minister explain why his Government have so strenuously opposed the extension of qualified majority voting on environmental matters and on the social charter? Is it not the case that, in the unified single market after 1992, every effort must be made to ensure that companies and countries cannot gain any unfair competitive advantage by seeking to lower environmental and social standards? Is it not clear, therefore, that common environmental and social protection should extend right across the whole Community and across all its peoples? Why is the Prime Minister still trying to stop that?

On the economic intergovernmental conference, will the Prime Minister first confirm that his hard ecu plan has effectively been dismissed by other member states as impractical and undesirable and is now a dead duck? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm what he stated in *The Daily Telegraph* just two weeks ago—that he accepts the principle of a single currency? And as no national Government or Parliament would ever accept the imposition of a single currency against their will, will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to tell us why he continues to give the impression that the menace of imposition exists when it so clearly does not?

Will the Prime Minister also tell the House how he regards the prospect of the creation of a European central bank and if there are any conditions in which he would accept such an institution if it were not accountable to elected democratic authority?

On the vital matter of economic convergence, will the Prime Minister tell the House how he defines economic convergence in the European Community? Does not he agree that real economic convergence must involve improving performance in research and innovation, productivity and the skills of the labour force, all of which are necessary to achieve and maintain high levels of employment and balanced growth?

After 12 years in power, what will the Government do in practical terms to improve performance, especially when investment, output and productivity are falling and unemployment is rising rapidly as a direct result of the Prime Minister's policies? If the Prime Minister attaches importance to real convergence, why does he not work for it instead of just hoping for it? As Maastricht approaches, why does he not stop playing for time for his party and start playing to win for Britain?

The Prime Minister: May I first thank the Leader of the Opposition for his support for the action taken on Yugoslavia and for the calling together of the CSCE mechanism? That will be helpful and I hope that it proves to be successful in bringing to an end what is potentially a very serious and alarming conflict. May I also assure him that the action to assist British citizens is proceeding satisfactorily and is under the very close control of the Foreign Office? We shall do all we can to ensure the safety and security of British citizens.

I can also share with the right hon. Gentleman agreement on the importance of the two intergovernmental conferences that are presently under negotiation. They are of great importance to our present, and perhaps of greater importance to our medium and long-term future. I share his view that there is no case for European defence divorced from NATO. NATO is the central pillar of our defence now, has been for 40 years and will remain so. However, I take the view that there is room for increased

action by the Europeans in terms of co-operation on a defence identity, most satisfactorily through the Western European Union, and by a larger European contribution to our collective defence.

In so far as the economic and political institutions are concerned, of course they must be democratically accountable and there are a variety of definitions among our partners in the Community as to what nature of democratic accountability that should be. There is no agreement yet about that, but I think that the views of this House are perfectly clear.

With regard to qualified majority voting, in 1985 we accepted the quite considerable extension of qualified majority voting in the Single European Act in a number of areas, and that has operated thereafter.

We have accepted a number of social charter areas, but there are some that we find extremely difficult to accept, precisely because they would damage that which we most want from the social charter, which is the creation of jobs. Neither the Leader of the Opposition nor I would wish to see action taken that would damage employment prospects in this country.

With regard to the hard ecu proposals, the right hon. Gentleman is wholly and completely inaccurate when he describes the hard ecu proposals as no longer being on the table. They most certainly are on the table. Not only are they on the table, but they have very materially changed the nature of the whole debate on economic and monetary union with the proposals subsequently put forward by other countries to harden the basket ecu and achieve the same economic effect that we sought with the hard ecu principle.

We have made our position clear about a European central bank. If that comes about, it is many years away and it would certainly need to be accountable to a directly elected body. As for a definition of convergence, convergence would certainly mean bringing the European economies closer together on inflation, growth, performance, fiscal deficits and, as crucial as any of those, on the flexibility of the economies to respond to changing economic circumstances.

With regard to the improvement of the economy over the past 12 years, the changing living standards of people in this country indicate very clearly the extent to which the economy has improved dramatically. In so far as our comparative positions on European matters are concerned, the right hon. Gentleman is in no position to claim that he has any monopoly on the future interests of Europe. We are negotiating for the future of Europe in a way in which the right hon. Gentleman never could or would with the divisions in his party.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Although I realise that the statement does not wholly concern Europe and that it is about wider matters as well, I propose to give precedence to hon. Members who were not called in last Wednesday's debate. I will call other right hon. and hon. Members later, if there is time.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations and those of the Government side of the House on the way in which he promoted and protected the interests of the United Kingdom and Europe at the meeting? With reference to the fact that the word "federal" does not appear in the conclusions of the meeting, does my right hon. Friend agree that a door that is gently closed can remain just as firmly shut as one that is slammed, and that it is less likely to provoke reprisals?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend emphasises the point with delicious delicacy. It was not a drafting session in the European Council—that lies ahead—but I made it clear that we could not accept a text that included the concept of federalism. It is dangerously ambiguous and it simply would not be acceptable either to me or to the House.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Prime Minister has rightly emphasised the stock-taking nature of the summit. Nevertheless, he is to be congratulated on ensuring that Britain does not suffer the catastrophe of isolation at Luxembourg. Does he now regret his uncharacteristic but nevertheless inflammatory remarks at Luxembourg on immigration? Does he agree that the Yugoslav situation underlines the importance of having a common European foreign policy? Does he realise that he has not dodged the crunch on Europe, but has merely delayed it, and that he cannot unite his party or lead the country effectively unless he clearly stakes out his position on Europe? Will he therefore begin the process now by saying clearly what is so obvious—that he profoundly disagrees with the crabbed view on Europe put forward by his predecessor in the House last week?

The Prime Minister: I dismiss the last remarks of the right hon. Gentleman—they are scarcely worth consideration. In so far as a common foreign and security policy is concerned, I stated expressly in my statement a few moments ago that I favoured a common foreign and security policy. Yugoslavia, as the right hon. Gentleman says, is a case in point, so, indeed, was the safe havens initiative of some weeks ago. There have been a number of other illustrations where the collective political force of the Community added to the individual political and economic force of member nations to the general good of all. The common foreign and security policy, working on the basis of consensus, is something which I wholly and unreservedly support.

The Government's position is wholly clear. We are seeking an agreement at Maastricht that I can safely recommend to the House and which I believe is in the interests of the Community as a whole. I am not prepared and I am not going to stake out every tiny dot and comma of my negotiating position and undermine that negotiating position within our partners in Europe. The right hon. Gentleman can ask as much as he likes, but what matters at the end is what I negotiate in Maastricht, and I shall give that primacy in all matters between now and then.

In so far as clarity on policy is concerned, the right hon. Gentleman is a bit rich in much of what he says. There is certainly a crystal clarity in the Liberal party's policy: it is the transfer of power from London to Brussels, giving the European Parliament the right to override the Council of Ministers, and the phasing out of NATO. That is not our policy.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): May I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend and his Cabinet colleagues on their skilful conduct of the talks and the success that he has evidently had in securing essential British and European interests, as well as on the clarity of

[Mr. Cranley Onslow]

his statement this afternoon? Those of us who heard the words that the Leader of the Opposition read out, who watched the Leader of the Opposition's face during my right hon. Friend's response, and who noted that it took the right hon. Gentleman 228 words the other day to say nothing are delighted that my right hon. Friend, not the Labour party, is in charge of these matters.

The Prime Minister: My right hon Friend is entirely right; I am grateful for his kind words. The divisions among the Opposition can scarcely be hidden, especially now that the Labour Common Market safeguards committee has made its position clear. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has called in a communiqué for

"The creation of monetary union governed by an autonomous central banking system which should arrive at the issuing of a single currency".

The shadow Secretary of State for Transport, on the other hand, has stated:

"We are against a single currency."

Which is the Opposition's position?

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Prime Minister aware that in these negotiations he is dealing with the rights of the British people to elect and remove Members of Parliament who make the laws under which they are governed? Is he further aware that in 1987 no party put these matters before the electorate? Is he aware that a dying Parliament has no moral or constitutional authority to reach decisions before the British people have had a chance to assess them? Is he also aware that issues such as the repeal of the corn laws, the Irish question and free trade have in the past realigned British politics; and that the examples of Slovenia, Croatia, Quebec and the Baltic states show that enforced federation can have catastrophic effects quite contrary to those anticipated by those who advocated it? Will he reaffirm that it is the rights of the people, not the rights of Parliament, that are the basis of democracy in this country?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Members of Parliament are sent here to exercise their judgment on behalf of the people. Parliament is certainly answerable to the nation, but Members of Parliament have complete authority in the mandate that they have to decide what they believe is right in the interests of the nation and to seek legislation to that end. In due course, they will have to answer for that to the electorate.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is no necessary contradiction between the judicious approach to developing the Community which he has adopted in his statement and the possibility of enlarging the Community, in good time and when the process is ripe, to include the nations of central Europe—notably Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary? Can he confirm that the association agreements to which he referred are but stepping stones to that desirable end?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can certainly confirm that. Nothing that we do in these two intergovernmental conferences must throw such a girdle around the present Community that it prevents others from joining it in future.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Prime Minister accept that, although action was taken on the events in Yugoslavia, many of us were extremely disappointed by the initial reaction of the Council to events in Slovenia? At a time when the Community is looking at the possibility of welcoming a common foreign policy, would not it have been better to issue a clear clarion call saying that we shall respect the ballot box, not the threat of the bullet? What will the right hon. Gentleman do now in the circumstances pertaining in Yugoslavia to recognise the democratic aspirations of these people?

The Prime Minister: The matter of the first importance is to stop the fighting and to prevent the potentially far worse fighting that might take place over the next few weeks. That is why we implemented the CSCE co-operation procedure and why we sent the troika, not once but twice, to Yugoslavia.

I understand and accept fully the hon. Lady's concerns about the independent rights of Slovenians and Croatians.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): May I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend for once again showing so clearly that it is quite possible and feasible to combine genuine interests of this country, as shown at Luxembourg, with the genuine overall interests of the Community? Does he agree that, contrary to the ludicrous assertion by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the development of a strict, strong, combined Community immigration policy vis-a-vis third countries would be well received by all member states?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for that remark, and I apologise to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) for neglecting to respond to his point earlier. The discussions that we had on immigration at the EC Council concerned our alarm at the potential immigration south to north and east to west which could occur over the next 10 years. It could literally amount to tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of people. It is necessary for the Community to look to its external borders. Conversely, it is equally true—we are already doing this—that we seek to guide help and assistance to those countries to minimise the number of people who seek to move as a result of economic migrancy.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Prime Minister aware that he is caught in a Catch-22 situation because he is opposing both the social charter and majority voting? If he maintains his objections to the social charter, his European colleagues will evenytually insist on majority voting on it, but if he accepts majority voting, that will enable them to implement the social charter that he so dislikes. Therefore, why does he not take the graceful way out and accept the social charter as a great milestone for workers' wages and hours and for women's rights?

The Prime Minister: We have accepted those parts of the social charter that are in the interests of the people of this country. We have not made a blanket objection to every element in the charter. A number of elements in the social charter programme have been agreed by all member states, including the United Kingdom, but we retain a strong objection to those parts of the charter that we judge

would cause and cost job losses in the United Kingdom. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would agree with that.

As to qualified majority voting, as I said earlier, we agreed an extension in the Single European Act in 1985. We shall examine specific proposals for extension on their merits, but we shall need to be persuaded that it is of benefit both to the United Kingdom and to the Community before we agree to any such extension.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I congratulate the Prime Minister wholeheartedly on the line that he took in Luxembourg and the important decisions that he and the Foreign Secretary secured. Does he agree that the real argument about economic and monetary union in Europe is whether the people of the country are better off by going in or poorer by staying out? At the end of the day, there is very little sovereignty in becoming relatively impoverished.

The Prime Minister: The economic interests of the nation are, after defence, the prime concern of this and every Government. My hon. Friend has pointed that out accurately.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On the wider issues discussed at the meeting, was it accepted that if the criminal regime in Iraq does not carry out fully the United Nations Security Council resolution on nuclear equipment and the destruction of all nuclear weapons, force may have to be used? Does the Prime Minister agree that the hide and seek games carried out by Saddam Hussein and his thugs over the past few weeks cannot be tolerated any longer?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman expresses my view clearly. The European Council strongly condemned the attempt by Iraqi authorities not to reveal part of their nuclear equipment, which we believe they have not done, in explicit contravention of Security Council resolution 687. In our discussions we made it clear that, so long as the Iraqis failed to comply fully with the obligation to observe all the provisions of Security Council resolutions 687 and 688, the Security Council could not envisage lifting sanctions in any circumstances.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Will my right hon. Friend say something about defence? Will he make it clear to his colleagues that the assembly of the Western European Union and its presidential committee have twice said that defence should be done by the Western European Union as part of NATO and that that was supported by the French socialist president of the WEU? Does he feel that his colleagues in Europe may feel that it is right for the European Community to accede to the Council of Europe charter on human rights?

The Prime Minister: There was not an extensive discussion on defence, although there was on security policy. Our partners in the European Community are aware that the view expressed by my hon. Friend is the view of the British Government.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): While I support the invocation of the emergency mechanism of the CSCE with respect to Yugoslavia, are not there sound reasons for believing that if any international institution can avert civil war in that country, it is the European Community? I welcome the freezing of EC aid to Yugoslavia, but are there likely to be direct talks between the Council—through the three Foreign Ministers—and the federal army of Yugoslavia? Will consideration be given to any other sanctions that the European Community might bring to bear to try to avert a tragedy in that country?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. It is probable that there will be direct talks between the troika and the people involved in the conflict in Yugoslavia. I hope that they will also speak to the federal Government and the Slovenes and Croats. The troika has a wide-ranging discretion at present and in such a swiftly moving set of circumstances we must, to a certain extent, leave it to the discretion of the Foreign Ministers to take the action they believe is right.

The fact that the Community has twice, within a matter of days, sent the troika to Yugoslavia is the clearest possible illustration that we agree with the central point of the question of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang): that the Community has a prime role to play in helping to bring the conflict to an end.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend accept congratulations on the positive approach he exhibited during the weekend in Luxembourg and on his determination to ensure that the agreement at Maastricht can be signed by this country? That may mean compromises not just by ourselves, but by others for the sake of achieving the ever-closer union to which all 12 member countries are committed. Therefore, during the next few months' discussions on economic and monetary union, will my right hon. Friend try to get the emphasis not towards the goal that we do not necessarily foresee, but towards the means to achieve it? We as the Conservative Government are unlikely to object to a single currency if that is to what the market leads, but we want to know the means by which that might be achieved. That is the contribution which we can make to a successful outcome.

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's view on that point. We gain and lose from time to time on compromises. That has been the way in which the Community has always worked in the past and it will certainly work that way in the future. The only means by which to achieve economic and monetary union safely and securely is by the proper convergence of all the European economies over a period of time. That was mentioned on three occasions at least in the communiqué that we agreed over the weekend. It was also the subject of a lengthy and worthwhile discussion in our deliberations on Friday.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Does the Prime Minister agree that, whatever federalism may mean specifically, in the European Community it is generally taken to mean the continuing process of the pooling of sovereignty on those matters on which that can be done appropriately? In fact, the Foreign Secretary said so at the weekend. Does the Prime Minister therefore agree that it can only be an English politician who can perversely and eccentrically say that federalism means the exact opposite—centralism—in the English language? The only reason he is afraid of any discussion of this issue is that it will underline the centralist tendency of the state in the past 12 years. He is terrified of any discussion of decentralisation in the United Kingdom and the willingness to move to decentralised institutions in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that had he been present at our discussions on Friday he would not have phrased that question in that way.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Did my right hon. Friend see the opinion poll at the weekend that showed that the majority of people, irrespective of their political views, would rather have him negotiating for this country in Europe than the Leader of the Opposition? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the prospects that came out of the discussions in Luxembourg bode well for a harmonious outcome at Maastricht in December? Does he agree that that will give confidence to business men and investors in this country?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it is in everyone's interests that we are able to conclude these negotiations and remove at the earliest possible opportunity the uncertainty that faces business men and others. It is for that reason that, despite the formidable difficulties that still lie ahead, there is a general agreement that we should seek to reach an agreement at Maastricht the sooner the better and the sooner we can put it before the House.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): May I say to the Prime Minister that I was terribly disappointed that he allowed himself to sink to the level of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jacques Chirac in his attacks against immigrants in Europe? What evidence does he have to sustain his contention that immigrants are responsible for increased crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and racial tension? Why was it necessary for the right hon. Gentleman to lump legal and illegal immigrants together and to suggest that, at 10 million, those people are equivalent to the size of the population of Belgium—the seventh largest member of the Community?

Why does the Prime Minister support racist and fascist police officers from Italy, Spain and France who wish to enter the United Kingdom in hot pursuit of immigrants and others? Will he say clearly that the Tory party will not use immigrants as cannon fodder in the forthcoming general election campaign?

The Prime Minister: The House knows me too well, and has known me for too long, to believe for one moment that the views that the hon. Gentleman sought to attribute to me are my views. They most expressly are not, and the hon. Gentleman knows that. He should not have expressed such views in that way.

There is legitimate concern in each and every country within the Community about what the outcome would be in the Community of a potentially massive immigration movement as a result of economic migrancy from south to north and east to west unless we take action to prevent it. I care at least as much as the hon. Gentleman about racial harmony in this country, and I do not wish to see it destroyed by the stirring up of old fears that have been put to rest.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decisive and, we hope, effective action taken by the European Community over Yugoslavia shows the right way forward for a collective EC foreign policy, just as did my right hon. Friend's initiative for Kurdish safe havens?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. I take the view as well that the Slovenes and Croats have a right to self-determination, but how that right is exercised must be a matter for discussion. We do not wish to see the civil war continuing. Indeed, we wish to see it stopped, and that is the first and most immediate duty of the troika of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Why does the Prime Minister believe in a level playing field for competition law and not for employment law?

The Prime Minister: I believe in a level playing field where that is in the interests of all European Community countries. We are saying that we do not want imported into this country employment law that would damage the employment reforms that we have made, which have been to the benefit of the work force and the economy over the past 12 years. Nor do we want employment legislation implemented within the Community where it would potentially cause the same damage as it would inflict in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on diverting the sterile argument about whether we should participate in economic and monetary union into the much more fruitful area of determining how we can achieve economic convergence. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is costing the German Government DM 150 billion a year to have monetary union with the former German Democratic Republic? That has cost the Germans a 7·5 per cent. increase in their general levels of taxation. Has any estimate been made of what it would cost us immediately in terms of increases in taxation here and in Germany if we were to proceed immediately to monetary union in the Community?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that it would be a practical proposition to proceed immediately to monetary union throughout the Community. Given the differing economic performances of the countries of the Community, monetary union would lead to massive regional unemployment, a massive collapse in asset values, a massive amount of unemployment generally, a massive population movement and huge demands for an increase in structural funds to deal with those problems. It is not a practical proposition until there have been various convergencies. That is undoubtedly meant by those who shout from a sedentary position.

There is an analogy to be drawn, though not an especially accurate one, with the merging of the deutschmark and the ostmark. Essentially what we saw there was the takeover of a weak currency by a very strong currency, and my hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the difficulties that that has caused. The merging of a dozen established currencies is a far larger and more difficult operation to undertake.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Prime Minister guarantee some practical action to curb the new international arms race and to support the splendid sentiments expressed in annex 7 of the communiqué? Is not it nonsense that while Britain has embargoes against many countries, it also supports the Chilean and many other Governments in their development of the multiple-launch rocket system RAYO in Buckinghamshire and Wales, even though the Chileans have announced that they will

sell that weapon of mass destruction to any country in the world? Will the Prime Minister take practical steps to curb the greatest evil in the world—the international arms race?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely because we are seeking a greater level of arms control that that statement appears in the communiqué and we have taken other initiatives elsewhere. Of course, countries retain the right of self-defence, but we invite all those that export arms to take great care, as Britain does, over to whom they export arms.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the conclusions reached at Luxembourg amply demonstrate that my right hon. Friend—to use the term of the Leader of the Opposition—is "winning for Britain"? Is he not also winning for the development of a European Community that is sensibly and pragmatically based?

The Prime Minister: In our discussions within the Community on the two intergovernmental conferences, we have sought to lay down the right framework for the future development of the Community. That is an immensely important job over which it is worth taking considerable care, and we are seeking to do so.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In respone to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), was not the Prime Minister adamant that there was no question of the Community lifting sanctions against Iraq? Has the right hon. Gentleman read the absolutely spine-chilling report of the Harvard medical school, which asserts that 170,000 under-fives are likely to die this year? Because of the lack of generating plant and medicines, there is the most appalling risk of gastro-enteritis, typhoid, cholera and hepatitis. In those circumstances—and not even for humanitarian reasons, but for the sake of the general impression within the Arab world—should not the right hon. Gentleman reflect on his policy?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may have been misled by what I said. Medicines are not covered by the present sanctions, so they can be sent to Iraq. Food can be exported with the approval of the humanitarian committee of the United Nations. Medicines and food should be going to Iraq, and they were not covered by my response to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick).

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that firm immigration controls are essential for good race relations within the Community, and that some European countries are having to learn that lesson very quickly? Does he further agree that the problems of drug trafficking, international crime and serious crime more generally are very important? Did he also make progress with those issues?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's views about the importance to good race relations of proper control of immigration. On the question of drug control, we examined and agreed to develop further the proposition by Chancellor Kohl to develop much greater co-operation between police forces in Europe specifically to combat the problems of drugs and other organised crime.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Was it not rather ungrateful of the Prime Minister to double-cross the Bruges group on economic and monetary union when most of that group voted for him in the Tory party leadership contest? Many of them are absent today, for some unknown reason. What will be the response of the president of the Bruges group?

The Prime Minister: As the premise is wrong, the hon. Gentleman's question is irrelevant.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the progress that he has made towards an agreement with our European partners will be a great encouragement to British industry and a boost to job prospects in Britain?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, with whom I agree. Industry and commerce generally will be much happier when the negotiations are concluded and they are aware of what the future holds for them.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Why cannot the Prime Minister define the word "federal"? Is he aware that federal institutions work only where there are proper democratic institutions, both at the federal and the state or national levels? What is happening about the development of democratic institutions in the European Community?

The Prime Minister: I said that I felt that one needed certainty in any treaty that one signed. If the hon. Gentleman cares to look at the dictionary, he will find at least five different definitions of the word "federal"—and that is in only the "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary." If he tries the longer "Oxford Dictionary," he will find more. If he refers to a German dictionary, heaven alone knows how many he will find.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the concern felt by many of us that, unless the principle of subsidiarity is rigorously and precisely defined, far too much power will be left in the hands of the European Court of Justice in determining the extent to which the House and other national European Parliaments are yielding up sovereignty?

The Prime Minister: That, again, is a problem of definition which the Community itself is currently examining. Provided that we are entirely clear about what is meant by subsidiarity—and by that, I mean that nothing is done at central level that can better be done, and should be done, at national level—it would be entirely right to include such a definition in the treaty. I promise my hon. Friend that we will seek to achieve that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am one of those people who look forward to the day when this country is part of a united states of Europe—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—with full political, economic, and military integration. I realise that that view is not particularly popular on this side of the House; and it probably does not go down too well on the other side of the House either. The sovereignty of the House started to go with the treaty of Rome, and has gone that much faster with the signing of the Single European Act. Is it not time that the British people were more fully consulted? Does the Prime Minister completely rule out the use of

[Mr. Tony Banks]

referendums for submitting to the British people the far-reaching conclusions that will be reached at the intergovernmental conferences and beyond?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman and I have known one another for many years, and he has never shied away from unpopular views—and I respect him for that. I do not believe that referendums are the right way forward. I believe that there will be a general election in the next year or so—[HON MEMBERS: "Oh."] I think that is probable—indeed, possibly certain. When we have concluded the negotiations in December, as I expect we will have to do, there will be a certain amount of work to be done before it will be possible to put the conclusions of those negotiations before the House. So it is very probable that there will be a general election before the House is invited to accept the conclusions of Maastricht.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are doing splendidly. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the limited and voluntary pooling of sovereignty within the European Community has been the main factor in stopping its members from having violent disputes among themselves? Is that not the lesson that the European Community has to teach eastern Europe?

The Prime Minister: That is certainly one of the lessons that we must teach eastern Europe, although there are others. My hon. Friend is right to point out that we have been pooling sovereignty with our European partners for 20 years. But we have not only surrendered a proportion of our sovereignty; we have gained a proportion of theirs.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): With regard to the free mobility of labour throughout the European Community, what is the position in respect of those hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who have long been domiciled in EC states? Are they to be denied the right of internal migration? Will they be confined to the countries in which they currently live?

The Prime Minister: No one will be confined in this country, but as I am not entirely sure of the conditions under which some migrant workers are resident in other host countries in the Community, I cannot answer in respect of them. However, I will find out the answer and write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are determined to strengthen the rule of law within the European Community? Can he say what proposals the Government have to enforce compliance with the rulings of the European Court of Justice?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly tell my hon. Friend that we are determined to enforce the rule of law in every aspect of the Community and it is precisely for that reason that we have tabled our own proposals to fine nations that fail to adopt Community law.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is the Prime Minister aware that it is well understood that in the past his predecessors as leaders of the Conservative party reached for the race card when their political fortunes were at a low ebb? Many hon. Members are deeply sorry that he appeared to reach for that card at the weekend. If he does not believe that to be the case, will he read newspaper reports of his remarks in Luxembourg and understand that what he said, and what was reported to be said by him, will give nothing but aid and comfort to racists in this and in other European countries? Will he give a clear undertaking that the United Kingdom Government will not join in any common agreement with other EC Governments about political asylum and refuge without the debate and approval of the United Kingdom Parliament?

The Prime Minister: The greatest damage to race relations in this country is done by people who seek to divine intolerance where there is none. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) heard what I said earlier to his hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant). I invite him to reflect upon it and accept it.

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): Dare I ask my right hon. Friend, when he discusses future arrangements for decision-taking within the Community, to be very cautious about ceding extra powers to the European Parliament over the size and distribution of the European budget, because it has not shown itself to be very assiduous in protecting the interests of taxpayers, especially in countries like this one which make a net contribution to the European budget?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point with which I agree.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): As the Prime Minister knows, the Euro-federal juggernaut slowed but did not stop at Luxembourg. What he said in his opening statement about foreign, security and other policies being dealt with outside the framework of the Rome treaty is extremely important. Can he assure the House that the presidency statement, which in its description of the principles of political union says that it is all to take place within "a single institutional framework", is a clear mistake and something that we are clearly not committed to?

The Prime Minister: No. That statement refers to the treaty of Union and not to the treaty of Rome. At present the political union treaty has the temple structure, in which two parts of it, including common foreign and security policy and general home and justice matters, are on a basis of intergovernmental agreement and are not subject to the treaty of Rome and to the Commission. That is the present position under the draft treaty; it is not yet finally concluded. There are sharp divisions within the Community about whether it should be a unitary or a three-tier structure. I am firmly of the view that it should be a three-tier structure and that is a matter for which the Government will fight very hard in the months ahead.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): As regards future discussion on the social charter, does my right hon. Friend agree that the main issue to concentrate on is even more imaginative retraining schemes so that unemployment in Europe may go down?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Twenty-three social action programmes have been published so far, and 12 of them have been agreed. We

shall argue very hard indeed for the sort of measures that create jobs and help employees, and hard against the sort of measures that jeopardise jobs.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government have, in principle, agreed to economic, monetary and political union and are now merely negotiating the method and timing? In respect of his important answers to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) about the duty of judgment of the House, and in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), was he saying that it is only constitutionally appropriate for a Bill endorsing any treaty to be placed before the House after the next general election?

The Prime Minister: No, I certainly did not say that that was constitutionally the position. I said that as a matter of practicality that was likely to be what the position would be. If we were at the beginning of a Parliament when this matter was in its present state of affairs, I would think it entirely proper for the Government and Parliament of the day to decide. That is constitutionally proper and I think that I would be difficult to shift from that view.

As regards economic and monetary union, I expressly said to the House earlier that I had entered a reserve on the question of a single currency. As to the principle of a single currency, when I introduced the hard ecu proposals in June two years ago, I made it perfectly clear that that could evolve into a single currency if that is what customers, individuals and countries so wished. That clearly would admit the principle, on the basis of its being a market-driven proposition.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Many of us feel much easier in our minds now that negotiations in Europe are in my right hon. Friend's hands.

Today's European buzz words are "convergence" and "level playing fields". If we are to see a united Europe in any of our lifetimes, does that not mean a massive transfer of wealth from such countries as Britain, Germany and France to, for instance, Greece and Portugal? If we wait for natural convergence, no one will be alive to see the united Europe that everyone says he wants.

The Prime Minister: Over the past few years—most notably perhaps in Spain—we have seen the use of changing economic policies within individual countries which have dramatically improved their living standards and raised them predominantly towards those of the more developed and prosperous northern states in the Community.

What brought that about was not a massive transfer of structural funds—although there has been some transfer—but the changing economic performance and opportunities of a single market, free of barriers, throughout the Community as a whole, and the right economic action within individual countries. That is the way in which we envisage Europe's growing and moving towards a level playing field.

My hon. Friend is right: there are not sufficient funds in Europe to produce that result artificially through the transfer of structural funds.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): First, does the Prime Minister agree that the main achievement of the Luxembourg summit was to delay any decision on the intergovernmental conferences? Secondly, did the Government make any positive contribution, or express any positive ideas, about the future shape of the European Community?

The Prime Minister: The answer to the first question is no. We were there, however, to take stock of where we are, and to set the orientations for the second half of this debate and the latter half of this year. In the last hour, I have set out precisely the measures that we and others took to lead us down that road.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call hon. Members who have been rising regularly, but I want to move on at 4.45 pm, because I shall in any case have to place a 10-minute limit on speeches in the next debate. May I ask hon. Members to keep their questions brief?

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who willingly voted to start down the European road in 1972, and confirmed ourselves on our journey in 1985, are now entirely happy with the route that he is taking? Will he accept from me—and, I think, from many of my colleagues—that it is nice to know what we shall do rather than constantly being told what we shall not do?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his generous remarks.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): It is nice to hear an account of a stock-taking, rather than a stick-taking, Council.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the time has come to remind the British People that the Community represents much more than regulations about crisps, apples and so forth? It is far more to do with how we can create the prosperity in other countries that will make their populations want to stay where they are. It is about being able to send Foreign Ministers with clout to help to negotiate on difficult matters that put all Europe at risk. Is it not time to make that more positive message more clearly heard?

The Prime Minister: I agree. This is about building the right kind of Europe for our children: that is what we are now engaged in.

It is instructive to note that, although we doubtless have considerable reservations about some areas in the Community countries around Europe are striving to join the Community, because they perceive it as the success that it undoubtedly has been.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): May I return to the subject of Yugoslavia? Is my right hon. Friend aware that both Slovenia and Croatia have populations that are larger than those of many EC countries? If both areas hold referenda that come down firmly in favour of independence, will not the EC have to look sympathetically at the idea of recognising them as independent sovereign states?

The Prime Minister: I think that it is premature to take that view. In seeking to end the present conflict in Yugoslavia, I am not sure that it would be helpful for such a statement to be made. We all understand the aspirations

[The Prime Minister]

of independence in Slovenia and Croatia, but my first concern is to try to stop what otherwise could be a potentially damaging and bloody civil war.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his approach to European integration has overwhelming support in the country? Will he disregard the shouts from the sidelines of his two predecessors, as he knows that he will receive overwhelming support when he makes his recommendations to the House at the end of the negotiations because it is his political judgment which we trust?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have no doubt that I shall receive much advice on many matters from all sources, and I shall listen most carefully to it. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I will have to make the decisions in Maastricht, and he and I will have to place them before the House and defend them.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his predecessor was absolutely right when she said how important it is to include European foreign policy co-operation within the terms of the Single European Act? Will he build on the obvious success that has been achieved by ensuring that we proceed not by amendment of the treaty of Rome but through closer intergovernmental co-operation?

The Prime Minister: I most certainly will do that. As I said to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), proceeding on an intergovernmental basis on foreign and security policy, on home affairs and on justice is the right way to proceed. We shall certainly do so.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Could it be that, characteristically, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has jumped to the wrong conclusions again? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the prompt response of the Council of Ministers to the dreadful problems in Yugoslavia showed that when there is a serious problem we can have united action? What would be quite wrong, and what the House and people of this country would not want, would be a permanent single Community foreign policy without the independent views of individual member states.

The Prime Minister: A common foreign and security policy will be successful only if it genuinely carries the support of each of the members of the Community. That is why we seek a common foreign and security policy based on consensus. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) rightly said that the Community was in a particular position to contribute to ending the Yugoslav conflict.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Among his many successes, I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend on the European Council's endorsement of his initiative for a United Nations' register of conventional arms sales. Does he agree that the collective will of the Community can be used to bring this dangerous trade under control?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree. We shall seek to do so in collaboration not only with our European Community partners but with other partners outside the Community but within NATO.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the widening of the Community to admit countries that meet our standards of democracy and economic viability is welcome, but that if every time a new state is admitted it brings with it one if not two new Commissioners the bureaucracy will begin to get out of hand? Does he agree that the structure of the civil service of the Commission should be monitored and controlled so that it becomes accountable to, and managed by, the elected Governments and Parliaments of the Community?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to warn that widening the Community may lead to an excess of Commissioners. We have tabled proposals that would reduce the number of Commissioners per country from two to one—not wholly for that reason but it would meet the same point.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his positive and vigorous approach in Luxembourg at the weekend. Does he agree that he would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to represent Britain's interests if over the past 25 years the Conservative party had fundamentally changed its policy on Europe seven times?

The Prime Minister: I cannot imagine to whom my hon. Friend is directing his remarks, but perhaps I can guess. I assure him that our position on Europe has been and will remain consistent. Other parties cannot say the same.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that there is widespread admiration and support, which has already been reflected in the opinion polls, for the combination of firmness, reasonableness and commitment to Britain being at the heart of Europe which he displayed in Luxembourg? Does he agree that a prerequisite for achieving anything in any negotiation is to have some idea of where one is going and what one is trying to achieve? On that score alone, the Leader of the Opposition and his shadow Foreign Secretary totally exclude themselves from serious consideration.

The Prime Minister: We are certainly clear about our posture and about what we wish to achieve in this matter. I share my hon. Friend's view that that is not the case with the Opposition Front Bench, as we saw in the debate last week.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend not simply on what he said this afternoon but on demonstrating clearly that in the coming difficult months he will definitely be the best man to bat for Britain. During his time in Europe, was he approached by any of his European colleagues seeking clarification of the Labour party's policies, particularly of the speech in last week's debate by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)?

The Prime Minister: I can honestly say that I heard no interest expressed in the Opposition's views.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I turn my right hon. Friend's attention to the point in his remarks that

affects more people in the world than any other—his reference to taking account of human rights in European Community agreements? Does that follow from the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development that our aid programme would be concerned with better government and effective use of aid? If so, when will we see a start in what the European Community proposes to do?

The Prime Minister: The statement by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is part of the process. The intention of the declaration was to guide the work of the Community and member states on human rights. The key element was a reaffirmation that action to promote human rights does not constitute interference in internal affairs. The declaration confirmed the support of the European Community and its member states for good government through their aid programmes.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's observations on European security policy in a most encouraging statement. I wish to press him on his admirable support for the Western European Union as the best European vehicle for enhancing European security, as we are a collective association of free sovereign states in defence. Does Britain intend to pursue co-location of the Council and Assembly and to advocate a European reaction force? What other measures do we specifically want to pursue to make the WEU work?

The Prime Minister: If we can, we shall pursue co-location. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has placed before our European partners proposals for a possible European reaction force. We foresee a development of the WEU that would form an organic link —first, with the Community and, secondly, and crucially, with our NATO allies and with NATO generally.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents warmly welcome his resistance to the imposition of a federal super state?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to know that.

Points of Order

4.43 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Today, after 12 o'clock—so I was not able to raise this matter under Standing Order No. 20—British Steel announced the strategic decision to close the Dalzell platemill in my constituency. It is one of the last remaining steel plants in Scotland. This was a major decision, but no announcement was made by the Department of Trade and Industry or by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. A statement was made by the Secretary of State for Scotland, but it was made outside the House.

The questions raised about considering the case made for redevelopment of the Dalzell steelworks have not been answered. No adequate measures have been taken to create the jobs needed to replace the steel jobs lost. Would it not be appropriate for the Minister to make a statement in the House this afternoon?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has raised this point of order now because the question arose after 12 o'clock, when I consider such matters. I am sure that his comments have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench. I remind the hon. Member that there will be a debate on Thursday on these matters when, no doubt, he will be able to make his points.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health any request to make a statement on the licensing of RU486, an abortifacient drug which is undergoing tests by the Department and is manufactured by Roussel? There were strong signs in the Sunday newspapers and today in the *Evening Standard* that the Department had given approval, yet there is nothing on the Order Paper to show that that approval has been given.

Mr. Speaker: That matter has not been raised with me, but I am sure that those who are responsible for such matters have heard the hon. Member's comments.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is a busy day ahead.

Mr. Bowis: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) raised an important matter. The drug is known to have produced cancer effects in France. It would be wrong for a licence to be given without a statement being made to the House.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member should use the channels available to him, not necessarily the Chamber, to raise that matter with his right hon. Friends.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Companies (Disclosure of Interests in Shares) (Orders imposing restrictions on shares) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

The Army

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Defence Committee on the Procurement of the Multiple Launch Rocket System and the Phoenix Remotely Piloted Vehicle, HC 49, the Fourth Special Report containing the Government's Reply thereto, HC 476, and the Seventh Report on the EH101 and Attack Helicopters and the TRIGAT Missile Systems, HC 243, so far as it relates to Attack Helicopters and the TRIGAT Missile Systems.]

Mr. Speaker: No fewer than 35 right hon. and hon. Members are anxious to participate in the debate. Given the late start, it will be necessary to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. I ask Front-Bench speakers and those right hon. and hon. Members who are fortunate enough to be called before then to bear that limit in mind so that as many right hon. and hon. Members as possible may be called.

4.46 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): Last summer, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence set out proposals on "Options for Change" and the future structure of the armed forces. He spoke of the opportunities flowing from fundamental changes in Europe which would allow us to ensure our security with lower levels of armed forces and with a reduction in the share of gross domestic product taken by defence.

My right hon. Friend referred also to the risks for security that remain in Europe and farther afield. Today is the 75th anniversary of the first battle of the Somme, when so many Northern Ireland soldiers gave their lives in defence of our liberty, and it is fitting that we should debate the future arrangements for the Army and for ensuring that the terrible events of July 1916 are not repeated.

It is a paradox that in a post-cold war world the risks may be more diverse and less easy to predict than the threat posed in the past by the huge military forces of the Warsaw pact massed on the borders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries. Our forces need to be not only well-equipped and well-supported but characterised by flexibility and mobility, ready to be deployed at short notice to wherever in the world it is necessary to defend security.

The Gulf crisis, which broke less than two weeks after my right hon. Friend's statement, has served as an unpleasant reminder that we should not begin to look at the world through a haze of excess optimism or contemplate abandoning well-established foundations of our security. The approach which we outlined last summer has been vindicated, for in setting out our thinking on "Options for Change" we recognised the need to retain a capability to react to emergencies and recognised that our forces must remain our insurance against the unexpected.

As for the position in Europe, I know that there are those who have suggested that the future remains too uncertain, the Soviet Union too little versed in notions of liberal democracy, for the changes to the armed forces to be sensible. One can point to the severe economic and political difficulties still facing the Soviet Union and its former satellites as evidence of potential for instability.

The Government recognise those concerns: that is why we remain fully committed to the collective defence provided by NATO and to robust and capable armed forces. It is also why we attach the greatest importance to continuation of the reform programmes under way in the Soviet Union and central and eastern Europe.

However, it would be foolish to ignore the changes that have already taken place in Europe; and there is now a great mass of evidence that these changes are so far advanced that positive response must be right. We are confident of the peaceful and co-operative intentions of President Gorbachev. The Warsaw pact's military structure has been dismantled, to be followed by the political structures—events of fundamental significance which, in the new security environment, pass almost unmentioned in the press.

Perhaps most important of all, Soviet military withdrawals from the one-time Warsaw pact countries are now well under way. All Soviet forces have left Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Soviet forces are expected to have left Poland and eastern Germany by the end of 1993 and 1994 respectively. By 1995, we expect that Soviet force levels in the area from the Atlantic to the Urals will have fallen from the 138 divisions of 1989 to about 70 to 75 divisions. The net result is that, by the middle of the decade, NATO will be facing about 1 million fewer troops in Europe.

The Soviet Union will, of course, retain the capacity to reinforce these forces from outside the ATTU region if they should so choose, but by the mid-1990s we would expect the warning time of a full-scale Soviet offensive in Europe to be a matter of weeks rather than days. Moreover, the Soviet armed forces are now engaged in a major programme of relocation and reorganisation that appears genuinely to reflect the new professed doctrine of defence sufficiency.

Since 1988 procurement and production of equipment for the Soviet armed forces, particularly ground and air forces, has fallen sharply. Between 1988 and 1990, it is assessed that tank production fell by about 60 per cent., from about 3,500 tanks a year to about 1,400. During the same period production of light armoured fighting vehicles was cut by about 40 per cent. and fighter aircraft production by about a quarter, with significant reductions in bombers and combat helicopters. Further reductions in military procurement are expected in the next few years.

When the NATO and Warsaw pact countries signed the treaty on conventional forces in Europe last November, we believed that it would be a further buttress to greater security for all parties. Since then, of course, there have been some well-publicised problems over the interpretation by the Soviet Union of the treaty's spirit and letter. We are pleased that they have now been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

We hope that the resolution of the difficulties over CFE will allow the treaty's ratification by the countries involved in the next few months. I suggest to the House that the series of events since last November proves the continued need for NATO countries to stand firm and united in our dealings with the Soviet Union. The eventual outcome demonstrates the benefits of that approach.

So the time is right for change; not for headlong rush towards disarmament and defencelessness as successive Labour party conferences have proposed with their

suggestions that there should be cuts down to the average of the NATO allies but for measured change which maintains adequate defences to ensure our security.

Our attention today focuses on the Army, which played such an important part in the campaign to liberate Kuwait. I will return to its role in the coalition's success in a few moments, but first I would like to say something about a matter which I know is of great concern to the House: the case of the three guardsmen Hicks, Povey and Corporal Ray who so tragically lost their legs when digging a trench on the British Army Training Unit, Suffield range in 1988.

I have been criticised in the press, which reported that I had said that they should get sedentary jobs for which they did not need their legs. Those reports were prompted by a press release promoting a "This Week" programme on the whole subject of compensation for injured service men. This shoddy and biased publicity material implied, quite wrongly, that I was unsympathetic to the guardsmen and cared nothing for their terrible injuries. In fact, my comments were made in the context of the tremendous efforts that they have made to come to terms with their injuries. What I actually said in a reply to Richard Linley, the programme's presenter, was—and here I quote from the transcript—

"they won't be able to do jobs like on construction sites and jobs where they have to be on their feet all the time, but it will be open to them to do a number of jobs in offices and so forth sedentary jobs that people like me have where in practice they don't actually need their legs for that job."

I made those remarks in the knowledge that former guardsman Hicks was looking for a job. I hope that he succeeds. I for one am certainly not prepared to condemn him to a life of unemployment. Mr. Hicks has made a remarkable recovery from his appalling injuries and is making excellent progress with his artificial limbs. The House must judge whether my remarks were fair and reasonable because they were not quoted in full in the press release issued by the "This Week" programme.

Guardsman Povey and Coporal Ray are, of course, still in the Army, but if they too are discharged I am confident that they will wish to forge new careers for themselves. Of course, their opportunities will be restricted by their injuries, but I hope that the spirit and determination that they have shown so far will continue to stand them in good stead. Whether or not they are ultimately successful, they will continue to receive pensions and other benefits.

In cases where a service man is invalided out of the services as a result of injury which is attributable to his service, he will receive a pension from the Department of Social Security—a so-called war pension—which takes account of the degree of disability involved. In addition, his Ministry of Defence pension will be uprated to reflect the attributability of his injury. These awards are tax free and index linked, and provide a continuing basis of financial support for the rest of his life. Clearly, money cannot really make up for the loss of limbs but society, rightly, seeks to provide through the state for those with such disabilities, so an injured service man will also receive certain allowances and benefits. Mr. Hicks, who has left the Army, is receiving £260 per week; this is the equivalent of about £350 before tax. It is instructive to compare that with a civilian injured in an industrial accident who will receive about £190 in the absence of a private pension.

In addition, since the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act in 1987, service men have been able to sue the Crown for damages if their injuries stem from negligence on the Ministry of Defence's part. It is this last point which is at the nub of the concern felt by so many hon. Members as to whether it is fair and reasonable that the injured, who have served their country well, should be required to prove negligence; and whether the Ministry, in dealing with such cases, is forthcoming and helpful, or seeks to hide behind a wall of secrecy.

On the first point, the Government fully understand —and share—the real sympathy which Members feel for these young men. On the other hand, despite the sympathy one feels, we have to see this sad case in the context of other cases which have occurred and which will no doubt arise in the future. We have concluded that the only equitable approach in these cases is to base the question of compensation—over and above appropriate pensions and allowances—on the test of legal liability. Ultimately, that will be for the courts to decide in an impartial way on the evidence of the case.

Secondly, there is the question of the Ministry's approach in cases such as these. We do not approach them in a narrow, commercial way, striving at all costs to avoid the payment of fair compensation where the facts justify that. We aim instead—as is right and proper for a public body which seeks to serve the community—to assist in establishing the facts on which a judgment of liability may be made. Our normal practice in claims cases is to do our best to answer questions and to provide advice on points of fact to a claimant's solicitors to assist in this process. Moreover, if our legal advice is that on the balance of the evidence there is a case against the Ministry, we would normally then expect to reach a settlement out of court, so saving the claimant the expense and trauma of a court process.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Despite the Minister's soft words, is he not saying that the soldiers must go to law and fight their case in the courts and that the Ministry of Defence is not prepared to give them an ex gratia payment?

Mr. Hamilton: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has a copy of my speech, and from it he will see that I am coming to further points on that subject.

I have today instructed officials to contact the solicitors for the men to offer a meeting. That will provide the best opportunity for a full review of the case and will, I trust, allow the men's solicitors to address the question of what further inquiries can usefully be made which they would like us to pursue. I hope that that offer will be taken up by the men's solicitors.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Minister will know that one of the soldiers, Sean Povey, is a constituent of mine.

I welcome the fact that there is to be a meeting between the solicitors and Ministry officials to discuss the case. But will the Minister bear it in mind that Sean Povey was 18 when he joined the Army and that he was delighted to join? I received a letter from a teacher at his school saying that it was the only job that he wanted to do and, apparently, the day he joined, he returned proudly in his uniform. When, a year later, in July 1989—two years ago now—Sean Povey and the two others were crippled for life, they did not think for one moment that they would have such problems in obtaining compensation.

[Mr. David Winnick]

Although we welcome the pension arrangement—I have said this before in the House—it cannot possibly be an adequate substitute for compensation, especially bearing in mind the fact that, also in July 1989, someone who lost both legs during the construction of the channel tunnel received more than £370,000 in agreed damages granted by a court. I beg the Minister and the Secretary of State, who I know is listening, to have compassion and understanding for the three young men crippled for life, who cannot stay in the Army and whose pension arrangements cannot possibly provide for capital expenditure on housing, transport and so on.

I hope that the meeting will lead to the granting of the sort of compensation that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House wish the men to receive. I have not met a single person in my area who does not feel that compensation should be paid. I do not believe that everyone is wrong and only the Government are right.

Mr. Hamilton: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. We are offering the opportunity for the solicitors to pursue these matters further, but it is impossible to predict the outcome.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No, I am afraid that I do not intend to give way further. The intervention from the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) took ages and there is already a time limit on hon. Members' speeches. I must get on.

We are talking about a very sad and difficult case.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No. The hon. Member for Walsall, North took about five minutes with his intervention. I shall not give way further.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The Minister has made it quite clear that he does not intend to give way.

Mr. Hamilton: This is a difficult and sad case——

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. John Browne: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister is afraid to answer questions.

Mr. Hamilton: Some would argue that it is inexplicable that such dreadful accidents can happen when no one can be held negligent. However, I think that the House will accept that the profession of arms, by its nature, calls on the service man to face risks in training that will generally be greater than those that a civilian will face. This, I fear, is a necessary part of his training which he undertakes in his own interest and in the interest of supporting his colleagues if and when conflict occurs. If we are to prepare our service men properly for the shock of conflict, our training needs to be as realistic as we can make it, and that calls for the use of live ammunition. Despite all the precautions that we take, however, unfortunate accidents do occur, and it does not automatically follow that such accidents stem from negligence.

We are all proud of the professionalism with which our forces fought in the Gulf. That in turn reflected the professionalism and realism of their training. Many of our units in the Gulf had trained at Batus, and I think would acknowledge how much they owed to that fact. A readiness to accept risks in training, albeit taking all reasonable precautions, saves lives when we have to face live conflict.

I should like to move on to our future plans for the Army, in which I know there is deep interest. In his statement on 4 June, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained what the future size of the Army would be. Next week we shall be publishing the statement on the Defence Estimates and setting out more fully our latest thinking on "Options for Change" across the range of defence activities. We shall also be keeping the House informed of specific measures affecting each of the services as decisions fall ready.

As with the other services, work in planning the future structures of the Army has been proceeding in consultation with NATO and with individual allies. As a result, we have been able to go a substantial way in fleshing out our initial proposals in a way that will meet both national requirements and the needs of the alliance.

In his statement last month, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House that NATO Defence Ministers had agreed in May on a framework for the alliance's future force structures. A central feature of that agreement is that, in future, the British Army's main contribution to the defence of Europe should be as part of a new multinational Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps under British leadership. The corps will include two British and two multinational divisions, as well as forces provided by other allies, and will have a range of deployment options throughout the Allied Command Europe area.

Mr. John Browne: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, especially in the circumstances. We have heard his views about the guardsmen's case and warmly welcome the proposed meeting with their solicitors. But what is of essence here is the constant reiteration of the assertion that no one is to blame. Where is the proof that no one is to blame? Surely someone is to blame. Why did not the board of inquiry investigate the reasons why the live round was lying on the range in the first place? That is where the blame is to be found but the board of inquiry did not even cover that matter. Will the Minister please give a guarantee that the meeting will allow the solicitors to have the board of inquiry reopened?

Mr. Hamilton: I very much regret having given way to my hon. Friend. I have stated precisely that the point of the meeting to be held with the guardsmen's solicitors is to explore all those matters and to ask those questions. My hon. Friend has asked exactly the same questions as the solicitors will no doubt ask at the meeting, which has been organised for that very purpose.

The United Kingdom will provide the framework for the new corps, including a permanent commander, a significant proportion of the headquarters infrastucture and some combat support. We shall assign to it an armoured division based in Germany in peace time and a

more lightly equipped division based in the United Kingdom. In addition, we shall contribute an air-mobile brigade to one of the corps's multinational divisions.

The ACE rapid reaction corps has a role which I know is warmly welcomed by the Army. It shows the high esteem in which our professional forces are held by our NATO allies. That demanding new role will provide a focus for a service, which, although smaller, will remain highly capable.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): My father was an Army chaplain for 30 years. Can my hon. Friend tell the House what will be the future of the Army Chaplains' department which at present numbers about 150? The Navy and the RAF have their own chaplains' department. Is the Army chaplains' department likely to be unchanged, and is its headquarters likely to remain at Bagshot park?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend will know that the adjutant-general is reviewing all the corps under his responsibility and is working many of them together into a new adjutant-general corps, with which the Army chaplains will be closely associated. We shall continue to have a requirement for Army chaplains in the future, although I cannot guarantee that we will have as many Army chaplains as we have today.

The Army will continue to meet its other commitments and I shall say more about this later. We shall ensure that those forces are properly equipped for their tasks. Ten days ago we announced that we are to place an order with Vickers for up to 130 Challenger 2 tanks to replace Chieftain. The rigorous assessment that my Department has conducted over the past two years gives us every confidence that this new British tank will be a very valuable asset to the future Army. We are also planning a major programme to improve the Challenger 1 tank. In addition to Challenger 2, by the mid-1990s, the Army will be equipped with a range of high-quality new equipment, including the Warrior infantry fighting vehicle, the AS90 self-propelled howitzer, and the multiple launch rocket system which performed so well in the Gulf.

I am pleased to be able to tell the House today that we will shortly sign a memorandum of understanding with the German Government for the production of the phase II rockets for MLRS. The new rocket, which can be fired from the launchers now in service, will give the Army the additional and very valuable capability to lay scatterable anti-tank mines at long range. That significantly increases the operational effectiveness of the MLRS system and builds on the success of that major international collaborative programme. Taken together, the announcement on MLRS and last week's statement on the new tank provide the clearest possible expression of our commitment to maintain an effective and well-equipped Army for the future.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Minister has referred to events in the Gulf. Will he comment on two stories in relation to the Gulf that appeared in Scotland over the weekend? The first said that the Gulf trust, which was established by the Secretary of State for Defence and which has now accumulated £3 million, will not be paid out to any of the relatives of the 42 people who were killed during the course of the battle. I would greatly welcome a denial of that.

The second story is that the United States has said that its report into friendly fire will not be made public and that British military chiefs will consider the report and then issue their own statement.

I am sure that the Minister will appreciate the distress that both those stories have caused to the families concerned. I expect clear guidance from him. If he cannot issue categorical denials at this stage, perhaps he can write to me or make a statement in the House.

Mr. Hamilton: Let me make the position about the Gulf trust absolutely clear. The moneys in the trust will be administered by the services charities and will be paid out on the basis of need to those people who have suffered during the conflict. That has been absolutely clear and money has already been paid out. Eventually, the money will be passed over to the charities. At the moment, in practice, loans have been made while final arrangements are being made for the money to be paid over to the three service charities. We have learnt many lessons from the South Atlantic fund which, as I am sure the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) knows, paid out very large sums of money at the beginning, and as a result could not provide for the much longer-term needs of many of the service men. I will come back to the hon. Lady on her second point.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The decision to equip the British Army with the Challenger tank is most warmly welcomed by people in Yorkshire whose jobs depend on that order. We also appreciate the fact that the decision recognises British techniques and engineering skills. We warmly welcome the decision.

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks. I hope that it will put Vickers in a much stronger position with regard to meeting the challenge in the export market. I hope that it will be successful in exporting Challenger 2 to many parts of the world.

At the same time, we have made it clear that we are seeking to make substantial savings in the support area, including headquarters, at least proportionate to those in the front line.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): Will the Minister confirm that a decision has been taken not to downgrade Army HQ Wales at Brecon in my constituency? Does he agree that, if that were to happen, there would be a tremendous loss of status for Wales?

Mr. Hamilton: We are addressing the whole question of the district reorganisation right across Great Britain. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that it is important that, when we try to make savings on the support side, we should address the question of the number of headquarters and see whether there are ways in which we can reduce them. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) will have to wait for a statement about that because a decision has not yet been made. It will be very difficult if, whenever we try to make any sensible rationalisations in the management of the Army, there are endless complaints from different parts of the United Kingdom that we all accept that economies must be made but, "not on my front door, thank you very much."

A number of initiatives are being pursued in the Army in line with that objective: restructuring of the Army's training base in the United Kingdom and of the logistic

[Mr. Hamilton]

support functions; a rationalisation of the corps in the adjutant-general's area with particular responsibility for personnel management, and a reorganisation of the Army's command structure in this country, to which I have just referred.

Many of the details still have to be worked out. The decisions are difficult and I fully understand that a number of the steps that we shall have to take will be disappointing to hon. Members on both sides of the House whose constituencies are affected. However, it is essential that we ensure that the tail of the future Army is kept in balance with the teeth. It is inevitable that that will require us to close establishments and to dispose of some assets as we reduce the defence estate to match our future needs.

Sir Patrick Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I must state at the outset that I have the greatest sympathy with the Minister and his right hon. Friends in the tremendous restructuring task confronting them. Is he aware that there is a widespread fear on both sides of the House that was perhaps best expressed by the defence debate in the other House recently, that the procedure is motivated largely by a resource-led scramble rather than being based on a proper assessment of commitments? That fear is widely shared. If the Minister can dissipate it, we will be delighted.

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As I have already said, this is a response to the major changes that have taken place in the world. The changes are very much in line—or less in terms of percentage reductions—with those of our allies. We have to face the reality that if we did not make the economies, we would probably be the only member of NATO that was not reducing its defence expenditure or reducing numbers in the light of new circumstances.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will appreciate the fact that the Minister is giving way so often.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy) is right. There is great concern about the scramble for economies which, of course, must be made. As the constituency Member for Wrexham, my main concern is for the survival of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, although I understand what the Minister said about the need to make cuts, "but not in my back yard."

Will the Minister assure me that cuts will be made with regard to the efficiency, professionalism and morale of the Army as a whole? If he can assure me that any regiment should not be part Welsh and part English as that would not benefit the Army as a whole, if he can assure me that when the cuts and amalgamations take place due regard will be taken of the regiments with very good recruiting figures and a high proportion of soldiers serving on long-term contracts, I am sure that the case for the Royal Welch Fusiliers will be——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that interventions must be brief.

Mr. Hamilton: I must be rather less generous in giving way because I am only half way through my speech and I have been speaking for more than 30 minutes already.

I can tell the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) that we take many different factors into account with regard to the rationalisation of Army regiments. We are leaving it very much in the hands of the Army to reach conclusions on those matters and to bring proposals to us which we hope to effect. It is better to leave matters like that. I hope that I will not be bullied by hon. Members on both sides of the House about their own particular regiments. Very serious considerations will be taken into account and I hope that the Army can reach conclusions so that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can report to the House in due course.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No, I am afraid that I cannot give way again as I must make progress.

As part of the work on the Army's training organisation, we have identified a number of areas where there is scope for more effective use of our resources. As a first step towards the restructuring of the training base, we propose to transfer the training of junior soldiers from three barracks at Colerne, Shorncliffe and Dover, and to reduce the amount of training carried out at three other locations—Bovington, Arborfield and Aldershot. All of those changes, which are subject to consultation with the trade unions concerned, will be achieved by transferring training to other establishments where we have spare capacity. Further announcements on the detailed implications of reductions in the support area will be made in due course.

There is another development concerning our training activities that I should report to the House today. I am pleased to be able to announce that after considerable negotiations the Ministry of Defence has concluded a new licence agreement with the Duchy of Cornwall. That agreement will run for 21 years and will allow continued high explosive firing until 1998, as well as greater public access. The new licence also incorporates the Department's policy of actively caring for the environment, and it establishes new procedures relating to environmental matters, including the creation of a Duchy deputy bailiff specifically charged with environmental monitoring.

The Army's volunteer reserves and reservists will continue to have a key role. We are examining our requirements in this area and, in particular, looking at the roles, size and number of Territorial Army units, having regard to the numbers that we can realistically expect to recruit and retain. We are giving careful consideration to the value of having reserves with a general purpose capability, which would enable us better to provide a framework for expansion in times of tension than units tied to specific roles.

As the House has been told, we estimate that the new structures will require a Regular Army some 116,000 strong, including trainees, by the mid-1990s—about 40,000 smaller than today. The strength of the British Army of the Rhine, currently more than 50,000, will reduce to about 23,000.

Detailed work on the implementation of our new plans for the Army is now in hand. Although we shall be making full use of recruitment controls and natural wastage, there will inevitably be a requirement for some redundancies in order to preserve the right balance of ranks, ages and skills. I hope that, as far as possible, those will be voluntary. Details will be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May we have an assurance that previous amalgamations of regiments and also the geographic recruitment areas of regiments will be taken into account, for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) mentioned? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that those are matters of great concern to the King's Own Royal Borderers, whose members want an objective assessment of what will happen in future?

Mr. Hamilton: The answer to that question is yes.

It is also inevitable that there will be a need for some amalgamations and disbandments of units. We recognise that carrying through the changes will be a highly complex undertaking, which will need to be managed with sensitivity. As the House knows, we are consulting within the Army on how that should be achieved. Right hon. and hon. Members who attended last year's Army and defence debates will recall that I gave assurances that the new regimental system will remain an important feature of the new Army. I repeat that firmly and unreservedly now. It is, of course, Labour Members who do not value the regimental system. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said in the House that, as new mobile force structures would have to be international units,

"I cannot see the regimental structure being relevant in its present form to the strategic needs of the Army."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1990; Vol. 174, c.704.]

We believe in the regimental system. As soon as our consultations are complete, we shall come forward with more detailed announcements. In advance of that, I trust that the House will appreciate that I am not prepared to comment on the future of individual units.

We do not need to look far for an illustration of their value. The past year has, of course, seen the invasion and attempted annexation of Kuwait by Iraq, and its liberation by the forces of a unique coalition of countries, including the largest British mechanised force in action since the second world war. We should not forget that, although the Opposition never fail to remind people that they supported the use of force when the air battle began on 16 January, their policy was not to fight but to wait and let sanctions work. If the Labour party had had its way we would still be waiting today, while temperatures soared, the rape of Kuwait continued, and the alliance of coalition forces came under increasing strain.

Mr. Rogers: In view of the support that was given to our armed forces by both sides of the House—the record is available to be read—I find the Minister's remarks most contemptible and unworthy of any Minister of any Government. I wish that the Minister would withdraw the imputation that our forces do not receive the wholehearted support of this side of the House, not just of the Labour party but of other parties. The Minister's remark was contemptible, and he should withdraw it.

Mr. Hamilton: I can understand why the Opposition are so sensitive about this matter. I was stating what their policy was. We have heard little of that policy since the conduct of the war went so well. We can rest assured that, if the outcome had been less successful the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) would be telling us how much better it would have been to have followed Labour advice, to shirk the war, to shirk the fight, and wait for sanctions to bring about the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that, repeatedly throughout the months of December and January, many hon. Members on these Benches, including myself, made our position absolutely clear—that is, if force had to be used, it had to be used?

Mr. Hamilton: The fact remains that it was quite clearly the policy of the Opposition that sanctions should be allowed to work. We all heard it; there is no point in our trying to rewrite the history books. It was Labour's policy that sanctions should be allowed to work.

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Were you not in the Chair or the Chamber when the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and, indeed, on many occasions the Defence Secretary said that they were very pleased that there was a united House of Commons because it made the task of fighting criminal aggression that much easier? The Defence Secretary was pleased that the armed forces in action knew that there was a united House of Commons behind them. The Minister's remarks are despicable and contemptible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: These are not points of order. Let us get on with the debate.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No, I shall not give way. I have given way much too frequently already. I have a long way to go.

Mr. Morris: Can the Minister give an assurance that, having regard to commendations that have been given by Minister after Minister, from the Prime Minister down, about the bipartisan approach to the Gulf war by both sides of the House, the Minister's remarks have been cleared by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Hamilton: I have already said that there was a bipartisan approach to the outbreak of hostilities. The policy of the Opposition was to wait for sanctions to work.

The basis of the British ground force was 1st British Armoured Division, consisting of 7th Armoured Brigade, 4th Brigade, an artillery brigade, a reconnaissance regiment, armoured and field engineers, an Army Air Corps regiment, and a range of other supporting personnel. The skill and bravery that they displayed in the campaign to free Kuwait must be a source of great pride to us all, and I would like to say a few words about that.

The division had a total strength of about 28,000 personnel. Its fighting strength included 180 Challenger tanks, 260 Warrior armoured combat vehicles, 90 artillery pieces and 18 Lynx anti-tank helicopters. A further 5,000 Army personnel were also deployed to the Gulf, providing engineering, signals and other support at RAF bases, a prisoner of war guard force, and headquarters and other support staff in the area.

The division's part in the allied military victory is now well known.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot give way again.

Mr. Rogers: As the Minister has mentioned the Gulf war, will he make a statement today on the sale of arms through the wholly-owned subsidiary, International Military Services, to Iraq and Jordan—arms that were

[Mr. Rogers]

then used to fight our troops? Will the Minister now confirm his continual statements to me over the past two years that there were no arms sales to Iraq?

Mr. Hamilton: There were certainly no arms sales to Iraq from British firms. That is what I have always said and I still confirm that absolutely.

During a remarkable advance of nearly 300 km over 66 hours, the division defeated the best part of at least three Iraqi divisions, taking about 7,000 prisoners and destroying or capturing about 200 tanks. By the time allied operations were suspended at 0500 Greenwich mean time on 28 February, 7th Armoured Brigade had taken up a position astride the main road leading north from Kuwait city, with 4 Brigade further to the west.

It should not be imagined that that advance was achieved in the face of no opposition. At times, Iraqi units put up firm resistance and tried to launch armoured counter-attacks. Overall, however, the Iraqis were not given the opportunity to organise effective resistance. They were outmanoeuvred and outfought.

Sadly, 19 British soldiers lost their lives in action during the campaign. For an operation of this size, that figure is very low, but that will be no consolation for families who lost their loved ones. I know that they will have the deepest sympathy of the whole House as they try to come to terms with their loss. Nine soldiers were killed when United States aircraft fired on their Warrior vehicles. I understand the particular distress that their families are feeling at this time. The inquiry into the incident is being carried out as quickly as possible, but it is important above all to establish the full facts. We will, of course, make known the results of the inquiry as soon as we can.

First Armoured Division achieved a magnificent feat of arms. An equally remarkable feat was the logistics effort required to move the division and its equipment to the Gulf, to maintain it in the harsh desert conditions, and to enable it to carry out its swift advance through the Iraqi positions. Each day, for example, the division required 400,000 litres of water and 500,000 litres of fuel. With anything less than first-class logistic support it could not have achieved as much as it did in so short a time. In the event, logistics and support personnel formed nearly half the strength of the division.

As a result of the division's deployment to the west of Saudi Arabia, the Army's logistic transport vehicles travelled on average about 650 km every day. Most traffic was restricted to only one major road. In spite of these difficulties, the logistic chain which was established performed magnificently. When allied operations were suspended, the division had advanced more than 300 km from its forward force maintenance area, and yet its logistic chain was still intact and fully effective. I am sure that the House will pay particular tribute, as do the fighting troops of 1st Armoured Division, to the excellent support provided by the Royal Corps of Transport, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, and all the other support personnel in the Gulf.

The logistic task in the Gulf is not yet over, however. All the division's equipment and stores need to be made safe and brought back to their bases in this country and Germany. The scale of the task, with over 15,000 vehicles and many thousands of tonnes of stores and ammunition to prepare and dispatch, was such that it was thought after the conflict that the removal of equipment would not be complete until December this year. In fact, the latest estimate is that it will be finished in either late July or early August. That is a fitting tribute to the professionalism of the logistic support group, and it reflects the high degree of skill and dedication of all the personnel who ensured that Operation Granby was so successful.

Individual reservists and members of the Territorial Army, most of them volunteers, made a vital contribution to the success of Operation Granby, particularly in medical roles, but also, serving under short-service regular commissions, throughout the teeth and logistic arms.

Hon. Members will recall that on 17 December my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence reported to this House that Her Majesty the Queen had authorised the call out of reservists under section 10 of the Reserve Forces Act 1980. Some 1,700 reservists were called out in connection with the Gulf conflict, over 1,000 of them soldiers, and almost all have now been demobilised. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for the dedication with which they served and to wish them well as they settle back to civilian life.

The situation in Kuwait is now such that we do not envisage the need to call our further specialists from the reserve forces under the provisions detailed on 17 December. Her Majesty the Queen, in exercise of the powers conferred upon her by section 10 of the Reserve Forces Act 1980, has today, by order signified under the hand of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, been pleased to revoke the authorisation for the call out of reservists in connection with the Gulf conflict.

This revocation is a formal step which makes it clear that no further call out will be undertaken in relation to the situation which gave rise to the order of 17 December. I should make it clear that this revocation does not affect the liability for service of the handful of reservists still embodied, nor does it affect their rights under the Reserve Forces (Safeguard of Employment) Act 1985.

Throughout the Gulf war, our soldiers were fighting under the threat of chemical attack from the Iraqis. That threat never materialised and, although it is difficult to define categorically why not, it is likely that the Iraqis were terrified that the United States would retaliate with weapons of mass destruction. In short, deterrence worked. It is therefore a matter of great concern to all our service men whether Britain keeps her independent nuclear deterrent. As a general election approaches, they look for clarification from the Labour party as to where it stands in this important issue. They will have heard last Thursday that Labour is dodging the question of ordering the fourth Trident boat and will keep its options open as to whether to cancel it. That will of course threaten our ability to maintain continual deterrent patrols if one submarine were to break down while another was in refit.

However, it is the recent remarks by the right hon. Member for Gorton that have caused most confusion. He has stated that Labour is not committed to negotiating away Britain's nuclear deterrent as long as other countries still have nuclear weapons. But that is where he is completely wrong. In its 1989 policy document "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change", a future Labour Government were committed to negotiating away Britain's deterrent in return for similar reductions in the Soviet arsenal. So what has changed? Do Labour party

documents not mean anything any more? Do resolutions passed by a two-thirds majority at Labour party conferences have no effect on Labour policy? One is interested to know who took this decision. Was it taken by the Leader of the Opposition and by a few people around him—or was the whole Labour party involved?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was part of the decision.

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps the Minister will cease his party-political ranting for a moment and tell us—this is a genuine question—about the threat from the so-called Iraqi nuclear capability at Aby Gharaib and Tuweitha.

Mr. Hamilton: I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman could help us and tell us how this amazing Labour party statement was arrived at. Perhaps he was a party to it. As he knows, we are hoping to implement United Nations resolution 687 which deals with Iraqi nuclear capability. The problem is being dealt with, and the President of the United States has made statements on the matter.

I turn to other activities of the Army in the past year. The same skill and dedication are, of course, demonstrated every day in the very different circumstances of Northern Ireland. Supporting the Royal Ulster Constabulary to uphold democracy and the rule of law against the terrorist threat remains, sadly, the Army's largest continuing peacetime commitment. In this it is well supported by the other services. The Royal Marines regularly provide a commando in place of an Army battalion, and the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force continue to make a major contribution to security in the Province.

The Army's force level in Northern Ireland remains at some 17,000 personnel. Over the past year, these force levels have been temporarily increased to deal with specific situations; a battalion was deployed in December 1990 to support the RUC in a period of especially high terrorist threat in the run-up to Christmas; another battalion was deployed in March and April 1991 to assist in the removal of two border check points; and another battalion has just returned to the mainland from the Province after being temporarily deployed there to support an operation to refurbish some security force bases. If judged necessary, such reinforcements could occur again.

The courage and sense of purpose shown by the armed forces in Northern Ireland in the face of terrible atrocities must attract our highest respect and gratitute. Tragically, a heavy price was paid in 1990 to preserve order against violence. A total of 15 soldiers were murdered by the terrorists. Eleven were killed while on duty—six in the IRA's barbaric proxy human car bomb attacks on two check points on 24 October, in one of which a Minister of Defence civilian employee was also murdered. Four other soldiers were killed while off duty, all part-time UDR members. A further 213 soldiers were wounded or injured in 1990.

1991 has thus far seen eight soldiers murdered—this includes two members of the UDR killed in an IRA rocket attack in March; three UDR soldiers murdered on 31 May at Glenn Anne UDR base by an IRA bomb containing some 2,000 lb explosive; and, most recently, Private Harrison, who was murdered on 19 June by the IRA in front of his fiancée while visiting her on leave from the mainland. Some 100 soldiers have been either wounded or injured.

The recent attempts at further attacks, last week, on the band of the Blues and Royals, and over the weekend against an RAF recruiting office in Preston, remind us yet again of the need for constant vigilance.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): As the Minister knows, the attempted bomb attack took place in my constituency. Will he pass on to the bandsmen of the Blues and Royals the message that they will always be welcome in Hayes, whatever may have happened? Does he share my anger at the words of the Labour candidate in Hayes, Mr. John McDonnell, who has in the past wined and dined IRA terrorists and representatives of Sinn Fein and who said, when he heard of the attack, that he would meet the IRA and Sinn Fein again tomorrow? Does the Minister share my disgust at that statement, and will he call on the Labour party to disown such a character?

Mr. Hamilton: I wholly support my hon. Friend on that. We must never give succour to IRA terrorists, and we must make it clear to them that, even if they do bomb people on the mainland, life will go on as usual and we will in no way be cowed by their activities.

There have, however, been notable successes in the campaign against the terrorists' criminal activities. During 1990, 217 people were charged with serious terrorist-type offences, including 18 for murder and 62 with attempted murder. There were further successes against the terrorists elsewhere in 1990, in the Republic, on mainland Britain and on the continent, with the discovery of weapons and bomb-making equipment and the arrests of a number of suspected terrorists.

The House will, I am sure, join me in saluting the bravery and dedication of these men and women who tackle the terrorist threat every day of the year. The number of awards bestowed over the years on members of the armed forces serving in Northern Ireland reflects this gallantry and commitment. The 241 awards made in 1990 included the first George Cross in 11 years, to an Army bomb-disposal expert.

In addition to the activities that I have mentioned, the House will know that the Army has undertaken a wide range of tasks over the past 12 months. They range from quiet, perhaps sometimes humdrum, roles to the most dangerous and demanding tasks. The qualities of professionalism and courage shown by the Army's men and women in these many different ways deserve the thanks of the whole British people: this year they have also earned a wider gratitude abroad by their part in the coalition effort to ensure that Saddam Hussein's unprovoked aggression against Kuwait would not stand.

The British Army continues to be a highly regarded and highly effective force, thanks above all to the qualities of its individuals and to their teamwork. Our responsibility is to give them the support they need to remain as capable and effective as they have proven to such good effect this year. In pursuing changes in structure, we must remain sensitive to those fundamental requirements.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): At the beginning of his speech, my right hon. Friend described, while the House listened attentively, the changes in the east-west situation. Has he heard the criticism of the size of the cuts in the Royal Armoured Corps? Does it not

[Mr. Michael Grylls]

worry him that there have been criticisms that the corps has been cut far more than it should have been in comparison with the rest of the Army? Would it not be better to make cuts in the tail of the Army rather than in the part that we would need if there were a conflict? Will my right hon. Friend bear that in mind?

Mr. Hamilton: I assure my hon. Friend that the reductions in the support to the front line will be commensurate with other cuts. It is important that we achieve this. The cuts in the Royal Armoured Corps reflect the fact that armoured divisions in Germany are to be reduced. Our need for armoured regiments is therefore reduced.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No, I must finish, or I shall be here for ever.

I have outlined the Government's overriding concern for the future of the Army. I believe that that objective should be endorsed by the whole House.

5.42 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): As the Minister said, we are having the annual debate on the British Army on the 75th anniversary of the battle of the Somme. If ever we required an illustration of the courage and dedication of the British Army, and the growing sacrifices that its soldiers were prepared to endure for this country, we need look no further than the Somme. If ever we needed an illustration of the folly and futility of war as a vehicle for solving political problems, we need look no further than the Somme. There the answer lies, on the bloody battlefield on which some 20,000 British and allied soldiers lost their lives in the first 24 hours, and where countless thousands more were destined to lose their lives over the next five months for the conquest of five miles of territory.

The anniversary is also a timely reminder that, whatever the advances in weapons and equipment over the past 75 years, whatever the progress in technological sophistication and whatever the refinement of the operational art of warfare, wars are still fought, the hardships of war are still endured, and the ultimate sacrifices of war are still made by the men and women who make up our armed forces. We gladly pay tribute to them today, not least because, for some time past, they have been asked to undertake their arduous duties under a cloud of uncertainty. They have been asked and they have responded, displaying a steadfastness of purpose in a European and international political situation that is almost unsurpassed in its fluidity. Old barriers are coming down and new problems are arising. Concepts of threat and of risk, of defence and of security are undergoing profound redefinition.

I wish that I could say that their fortitude has been matched by the insight, clarity of vision and decisiveness of the Ministers who have the temporary honour of presiding over the Army's future and fate, but that would be stretching the credibility of the House too far, even on the anniversary of the Somme—perhaps I should say particularly on the anniversary of the Somme, because that battle and that war proved a long-lasting saying about military life: even the most lion-hearted can be led by donkeys.

I was about partially to exclude the Minister of State from that, and to congratulate him on having made, at least in his opening paragraphs, a genuine attempt to give us some form of strategic review, but I am afraid that the manner in which he demeaned himself and the House by the misuse of the slur and his comments on the war of the United Nations, with the full support of both sides of the House, against Iraq detracted from anything that he said. What a pity that he did that. If that is the level of the much-heralded attack on the Labour party's defence policy, and if that is where the Conservative party has retired to in its attempts to gain votes at a general election, let us have more of it. I am sure that the British people will be thoroughly revolted by an attempt to use a war in which our soldiers died, a war supported by every party, for cheap political gains.

Mr. Winnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that, when it came to appeasement and trying to avoid war when it was obvious that it was inevitable, and condoning, in some respects at least, what occurred in the invasion of Kuwait, the most notorious person putting forward that view was the former Tory leader and Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) who, at least until the beginning of the war, used every argument both in and out of the House to avoid facing the fact that we had to fight fascist aggression?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend states the facts. I have no wish—nor have my colleagues on the Front Bench or throughout the party—to reduce a magnificent effort by our soldiers and the magnificent unity of the House by involving myself in any attacks or slurs on any hon. Member. Whatever our views, and from whatever side of the House they emanated, whether it was the case mentioned by my hon. Friend or that of the pacifists, or those Labour party members who took a different view, I am certain that all spoke with the utmost sincerity. I respect the views that they espoused and will not attack them for holding them, particularly not for cheap political gains.

In the 13 months since the previous Army debate, we have witnessed events of great significance for the future of the British Army. We have seen the painful beginnings of the "Options for Change" process, an exercise which is turning into a defence review by striptease. We have seen the conclusions of NATO's force restructuring, in which our forces have deservedly been assigned a leading role. Not least, we have participated in a multinational coalition which successfully defeated Iraqi aggression in the Gulf. Each of those would have been significant enough in its own right, but taken together they will result in the most profound changes experienced by our armed forces since world war two.

I shall begin with an assessment of the Gulf war. I thought that I could say that I spoke for the whole House when I said that the contribution made by the British Army, with the support of the House, to the liberation of Kuwait was outstanding. I am sorry that, since the Minister's statement, I cannot now say that that was with the continuing support of the whole House. Nevertheless, we congratulate our forces because, from the beginning of the ground campaign on 24 February, it took

approximately four days for the 1st Armoured Division to disable the Iraqi armoured reserve and reach its intended position north of Kuwait city.

One of the most impressive statistics of that short but violent campaign is that not one Challenger tank was lost to enemy fire. By any standards, it was an impressive operation, proving once again the superior fighting quality and logistical efficiency of the British Army—something which the Minister mentioned.

In paying tribute to our troops, none of us should forget the sacrifices that were made. During our deployment in the Gulf 44 British soldiers lost their lives and approximately 43 were injured. Remarkably light as such casualties were in the face of such an enemy, each is a tragedy to be mourned. In the wake of victory we should not forget that many Iraqis perished during and after the war. For the most part they, too, were the victims of Saddam Hussein's megalomania.

Perhaps the most tragic accident to involve British troops during the war was the so-called "friendly fire" incident in which nine Royal Fusiliers were killed by a United States A-10. Considerable concern has been expressed about those deaths, and rightly so, not least because, four months later, there still appears to be a great deal of confusion about what went wrong and who was to blame. This has been an agonising time for the grieving relatives. Whatever the final outcome of the inquiry, I hope that the Minister can promise that there will be a full and frank disclosure of the report and its conclusions. When the Minister replies to the debate I hope that he will inform us what progress, if any, is being made on friend or foe identification systems.

Another grave cause for concern that has arisen as a consequence of the Gulf war is the sanctioning of the use of about 200 Royal Engineers in mine-clearing operations being conducted by a private contractor, Royal Ordnance. I have already raised this matter with the Minister in correspondence and on the Floor of the House. There is considerable anger in the Army because its troops are effectively being used as mercenaries. I share that anger.

I have been unimpressed by the assurances I have received from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that Royal Ordnance will cover the expenses of the deployment and that the engineers will be involved only in the location of mines and unexploded shells, not their disposal. Expenses or not, the British Army does not exist to provide such a hidden subsidy to a private profit-making concern. The location of mines and shells is in itself an extremely dangerous task and the lives of service men have been put at risk in a totally irresponsible manner. I urge the Minister to assure the House that there will be no repetitions of such incidents.

Sir Alan Glyn: What is the hon. Gentleman's view on the safe areas for the Kurds? Should we or should we not protect those areas until United Nations forces take our place? The United Nations observers are incapable of doing the job.

Dr. Reid: Since the beginning of the Gulf conflict we have consistently urged that all measures should be taken through the auspices of the United Nations and that all support should be given to any resolution or initiative taken by the United Nations. The problem was not the spirit in which the havens were embarked upon, but the thinking through of the likely outcome of the difficulties of establishing and then removing such havens.

Earlier I spoke about the performance of the Challenger tank in the Gulf. It exceeded all expectations and Vickers has now reaped the reward with an order for Challenger 2 as a consequence. That decision, along with two announcements this evening, has the virtue of allowing the Government to claim that they have managed to decide on something in the procurement sphere. That matter will be covered more extensively by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), if he is fortunate enough to participate in the debate.

Questions have arisen on the availability of spares for the 1st Armoured Division, which were smoothed over by the Minister today. It is fairly common knowledge that that division's Challengers were only kept fully operational in the Gulf by stripping parts from the two divisions that remained in Germany. Can the Minister confirm whether that is true? If it is, it appears that the British Army of the Rhine would be only partially operational in the event of war. Such confirmation would vindicate my hon. Friends, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda, who have argued that the sacrifice of the spares budget to other projects in the past few years has been a false economy.

Can the Minister confirm or deny a report that appeared on 6 June in the *Glasgow Herald* to the effect that the 157 Challengers used in the Gulf have been left there for a long time to rust? Can the Minister elaborate on the questions asked of him by the Select Committee on Defence on that subject? I am well aware that press reports frequently turn out to be exaggerated and that may be the case in this instance. However, I am sure that we are all particularly concerned by the report in the *Glasgow Herald* since it quotes a senior officer as describing the situation as "nothing short of vandalism by neglect."
Can the Minister assure us that that is not the case? How much of the equipment has been retrieved so far? What is the estimate of any damage that may have resulted from that incident?

The Minister was correct to mention Northern Ireland, because in addition to participating in the multinational coalition in the Gulf in the past year, the British Army has continued to fulfil its other duties, not least of which is guaranteeing the security of Northern Ireland.

Since the last Army debate 16 soldiers have been murdered by the IRA, including five members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. In addition, 15 Royal Ulster Constabulary officers have been murdered. In common with the Minister, I wish to record our debt to those men and all those who continue to fight against terrorism in the most difficult of circumstances.

Last year the Provisional IRA sunk to new levels of depravity and cowardice with its use of human-proxy bombs. What could be more sadistic than kidnapping a person's family and then forcing that person to drive a van-load of explosives at a checkpoint? On 24 October six soldiers and one civilian were killed in two such incidents. Fortunately, since then, similar attempts have failed.

For all its blood-letting the IRA cannot ignore one simple fact. As an organisation which likes to consider itself an army, it, too, must depend on morale. After 21 years of killing and maiming it has palpably failed to achieve its objectives and it knows it. Even the IRA is beginning to see the futility of its actions. I am sure that we

[Dr. Reid]

all hope that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is successful in his search for a political solution. Such a settlement would deliver a devastating blow to terrorism.

"Options for Change" will probably and properly occupy most of tonight's debate. The House could be forgiven for remaining somewhat confused about this process—the defence review that isn't. "Options for Change" could perhaps be best described as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma", if I am permitted to misquote a former Prime Minister.

It should be put on record that the Secretary of State was apparently incapable of even choosing an accurate title for the process that is now under way. "Options for Change" is a complete misnomer. Where are the options? What options have been or will be placed before Parliament? On what grounds are the supposed options being considered within the Ministry of Defence and by whom? Against what criteria are they being measured in the absence of a full defence review? I shall be happy to give way at any stage if the Secretary of State wants to elaborate rather than sit here like the silent service.

It is becoming clearer by the day that, so far as Parliament is concerned, the only option that we will have is to take it or leave it when the bureaucracy has completed its covert endeavours. All of that would be bad enough if the Secretary of State and Ministers showed any sign of being in control of the process, but they appear to be genetically incapable of taking as important a decision. There is now a growing feeling on all sides of the House that if the Secretary of State was asked the simple question, "Do you have problems making decisions?", he would probably answer, "Well, yes and no."

The Secretary of State has now had almost 12 months to marshal the collective cognitive processes of his colleagues and what is the result of that massive intellectual effort? On 25 July last year the Secretary of State told the House that he envisaged a Regular Army of "around 120,000". He said that he would provide further substantial details in due course. On 4 June this year, after 10 long and arduous months of mental toil and turmoil——

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): And a war.

Dr. Reid: I shall come to the war in a second. As they say in "Fawlty Towers", "Don't mention the war."

After 10 long and arduous months of mental toil and turmoil, no doubt with the able assistance of a Ministry of Defence establishment of thousands, the right hon. Gentleman informed the House that he envisaged a Regular Army of 116,000. We were told of nothing else. In short, it has taken Ministers 315 days of supreme effort to arrive at the conclusion which they had first arrived at during July 1990.

If there has been a lack of decisions, there has been no lack of excuses. This evening, the Secretary of State gave us one of his favourite excuses—the war. There has been no shortage of excuses for the delay in providing us with a comprehensive review. We were told in July 1990 that the Secretary of State had made merely a preliminary statement. It was then said that decisions—D-day itself—would not be far off. Then D-day was postponed because of the conventional-forces-in-Europe negotiations. We were then told that D-day had been postponed again because of the consequences of German unity. That was after the wall had come tumbling down—largely, it seems, because of a trumpet blown far away in Finchley. Then it was the Gulf war that caused the delay. The next delay was NATO's restructuring. No doubt we shall soon be told that the Glasgow fair holidays are to blame.

Only one thing has become clear, and that is that the D of D-day stands not for decision but for that famous D-word, dither. I hope that we shall not be offered the same excuses this evening as those that the Secretary of State has used in the past. The excuses are that the Gulf war delayed the review and that the Government waited until NATO had concluded its defence review before they came to a decision on force levels.

I shall take up the excuse that has been given from a sedentary position by the silent Secretary of State, but I am somewhat surprised that that excuse turns out to be the war. My colleagues and I who considered the Armed Forces Bill and the Atomic Weapons Establishment Bill in Committee made the generous offer that we were prepared to suspend the deliberations of the Committees to allow Ministry of Defence civil servants and others to concentrate on the war effort. We were told explicitly—this can be found in the report of the proceedings in Committee—that there was no need to suspend the Committees because it would be business as usual for the MOD throughout the war. It is clear that the Gulf war can be no excuse for delay.

The second excuse is that the Government had to wait for NATO's restructuring. The Secretary of State's claim that he was waiting for an announcement on future NATO force structures before allowing us to enter into the myriad secrets of "Options for Change" is not borne out by General Galvin"s comments to the Royal United Services Institute on 30 May, to the effect that his officials had been waiting for individual member countries to decide on their own force levels before NATO finalised its arrangements. Indeed, most of our NATO allies are far more advanced in force restructuring than we are.

The fact is that the Government's excuses are entirely bogus, and they should admit that. They are excuses that are designed to obscure another massive dither. The Secretary of State is directly to blame for the decision-making paralysis that has gripped the MOD for more than a year. I have no doubt that if he had left the decisions to his junior Minister, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, they would have been taken ruthlessly and speedily, though they might have been less tasteful to the House.

Damage has been caused by prevarication. The despondency that is to be found in the Army and in defence industries could easily have been avoided. We are left with a Regular Army of 116,000 troops, a cut of about 40,000. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces tried this evening to give us the nearest thing yet to an outline of a strategic position, but in the absence of a full defence review and of any clearly thought-out and published criteria by which decisions are being taken, the cut of 40,000 begs two unanswered questions.

The first question is why there should be a cut of 40,000. The second question is, "Where are the cuts to be made?" Why was the cut not 30,000 or 50,000 instead of 40,000? The Opposition have asked repeatedly—we have repeatedly been refused an answer to the question—

whether there is a strategic rationale that explains the extent of the cuts. If there is not, the cut of 40,000 is, as we suspect, a short-term arbitrary cost-cutting exercise, and a disgrace. If there is a rationale that explains the cut, it is the best kept secret since the Normandy landings and the Government have been misleading the House. That is an even greater disgrace.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On Thursday, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, was kind enough to confirm that his party's defence aspiration was to reduce spending to 50 per cent. of what it is now by the year 2000. I understand that the Labour party has an aspiration, or even a policy, of cutting spending by a third at least, although that aspiration or policy is undermined by some Labour Members who want spending to be cut by a great deal more. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain to the House why it is the Opposition's aspiration or policy to cut spending by a third, without any comments being made about commitments, when they are criticising the Government by cutting spending by a fifth.

Dr. Reid: My policy is not to cut by a third. My policy, and the policy of the Opposition Front Bench, is to initiate a strategic analysis of the present threat, and from that to allocate a response. We do not endorse the Government's policy, which is, "How much do we have to save and what can be cut to achieve that saving?" I shall take up this issue later in my speech and elaborate upon it.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: I ask the hon. Gentleman to allow me to make some progress. The Minister made a long speech and, unfortunately, my speech will be a little longer than usual.

All the evidence suggests that no strategic rationale lies behind the cuts. It seems that there is no logic attached to them. I shall give two examples. First, in his statement last year on "Options for Change", the Secretary of State said that there would be a greater reliance on reserve forces. There are strong rumours a year later that the regular-reserve force mix that is being considered within the Ministry of Defence will involve cutting the Territorial Army to 51,000. If that is so—I hope that the Minister who replies will be able to confirm or deny the rumour—we are talking of a 40 per cent. reduction in the Territorial Army's formal establishment, compared with a cut of 25 per cent. in the Regular Army's establishment. How is that consistent with the words of the Secretary of State in July 1990 that there would be a greater reliance on reserve forces?

If there is to be a greater reduction in the reserve establishment than in that of the Regular Army's, and if there is no strategic rationale for that, the inescapable conclusion is that the cuts will be made not on the basis of military and defence criteria but according to political and lobbying criteria. Could it be that the disproportionate cuts that are about to be inflicted on the reserve forces are the result of the relatively weak lobbying power of those forces within the Ministry of Defence?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I understand the hon. Gentleman's thinking and I know that he is trying to advance a valid argument. I think, however, that he forgets an important factor, which is that a review has been conducted, with us playing our part, through NATO. That is the strategic review. If he examines that, he will more clearly understand what "Options for Change" is all about.

Dr. Reid: A review has, indeed, been conducted by NATO. There has been far more of a review at NATO level than at Government level. Although the United Kingdom is a member of NATO, and although there is an overlap of interest, the United Kingdom has a separate dimension. Not all of our military commitments are related directly to NATO, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. We have four and a half roles, and some of them have nothing to do with NATO. I agree that NATO has done a considerable amount of thinking and has published many more options than the British Government. I am asking the Government to follow NATO's lead and to tell us the basis on which decisions about reserve forces and regiments of the Regular Army will be made. If they do not do that, they will be subject to pressures from lobbying from local interests or by the Treasury.

The questions that arise in respect of Territorial Army cuts arise also in terms of the Regular Army. It has been strongly suggested in the press, presumably on the basis of unattributable briefings by representatives of the Government, that the headquarters, one regular battalion and all three reserve battalions of the Parachute Regiment are to be cut. Where is the logic in cutting a highly mobile, fully established and well-regarded Parachute Regiment at exactly the same time as Britain is being assigned a leading role in NATO's rapid reaction corps? Surely greater emphasis, not less, is being placed on the mobility and flexibility of troop deployments. The answer is that no one knows what the logic is, precisely because of the lack of any coherent, top down, strategic declaration by the Government. The same problem is apparent with the infantry divisions.

One of the major problems affecting the British Army during recent years has been recruitment and retention. The Army is 3,000 soldiers below strength, and even after a cut of 40,000 the problem of recruitment and retention is likely to remain. However, from the rumours that we have heard there appears to be no sign—until tonight, when the Minister gave a reassurance—that the divisions and regiments with the best recruitment and retention records will be treated any differently from those with bad records. Again, lobbying power appears to be playing a significant part, especially in any consideration of the future of the Household division, which has a number of influential supporters.

My second question is about exactly how those cuts will be made. Perhaps the most craven act of the whole sorry business was the Secretary of State's attempt to protect himself politically by demanding that the Army decides which regiments are to be cut. It must be the first recorded case of a firing squad being ordered to stand in a circle. What leadership, what courage, what a cheek—the Secretary of State gives a whole new meaning to Churchill's phrase, "What a chicken! What a neck." This bunch of Ministers could never be accused of cowardice in the face of the enemy, only cowardice in the face of their friends.

Are not the Government embarrassed by the fact that two divisions, the Scottish and the Queen's, are reported to have refused to make any recommendations? Can anyone blame them? It is silly of the Secretary of State to expect the regiments effectively to sign their own death warrants.

[Dr. Reid]

It is an abdication of responsibility and another example of the right hon. Gentleman being incapable of making a decision.

Mr. Livsey: The two Welsh regiments in the Prince of Wales division—the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Royal Regiment of Wales—are being outmanoeuvred within the division, with the aim of one of the Welsh regiments having to go. The people of Wales are resisting that most strongly.

Dr. Reid: I am genuinely trying to help the Secretary of State and the Minister. The Minister knows that I always try to be helpful on these issues. In the absence of any published strategic criteria or a full defence review, whatever decisions they take they will be murdered by local interests, by lobbying and by the Treasury. In the absence of a full defence review, which has been constantly urged on the Government by the Labour party, it is inevitable that decisions will be determined largely not by strategic and military considerations, but by a combination of political expediency, old-boy lobbying and Treasury cost cutting.

To enter into a major force restructuring process without first having carried out the essential preliminaries of a full strategic review is to concede all the arguments in advance to the lobbyists and to the Treasury. It is a recipe for expediency, not for rational restructuring. It will mean not only a diminution of defence spending and of force levels—both of which are understandable and welcome in the present circumstances—but a maldistribution of resources within the reduced budget and a maldeployment of the reduced forces, neither of which is understandable or welcome.

Mr. Tom King *rose—*

Dr. Reid: My speech will have been successful if only because it has brought the Secretary of State to his feet.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman touches on a serious matter—the maldistribution of resources and the need to avoid that. If I understand him correctly—and I do not want to mislead the House—he said that the Labour party has not yet conducted any strategic review of the future for defence. Has it yet decided how much money it will spend on defence?

Dr. Reid: The Secretary of State is not misleading the House. He was correct to say that the Labour party has not yet carried out a full defence review, but we intend to do that within the first six months of government. We have not had the assistance of 150,000 civil servants, as the right hon. Gentleman has had. It is, therefore, all the more incredible that the Labour party is far more advanced on strategic thinking than the Secretary of State and his Ministers. We do not blame hon. Members or ex-members of regiments for fighting their corners, but we condemn the Government for embarking blindfolded on the exercise.

The regimental system and the structure and organisation of the British Army developed in the 19th century in response to its role as an imperial policeman, and it still reflects that basic structure. If it is to meet the demands and the challenges of the 21st century, its reformation should be based on at least a full review of those demands and challenges.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Dr. Reid: I am referring to a document called, "The Operational Arm of Warfare". I shall give the hon. Gentleman the relevant pages later. If I am wrong, the Army is wrong.

Sir David Price: The history of our regiments shows that they were founded in the 18th, not the 19th century, and many were raised privately. Is the hon. Gentleman recommending that we return to private armies?

Dr. Reid: If I am wrong, I shall stand corrected, and I shall bring that to the attention of the author of "The Operational Arm of Warfare", which was produced by the Army staff college. No doubt the hon. Gentleman, with his reservoir of knowledge, is better versed than the staff college.

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): A piece of regimental history that should be known is that some of the regiments are more than 325 years old. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) was right to say that they were raised privately. They were given numbers, and they were then given county titles if they so wished. That is why their titles have the county first, then the number.

Dr. Reid: I shall stand corrected if I am wrong, but I repeat that the regimental system and the structure and organisation of the British Army developed in the 19th century in response to its role as an imperial police force, and it stil reflects that basic structure. Those words can be read in *Hansard*, and they can be compared with the report by the Army staff college. If I stand corrected, so does the Army staff college.

If the consequences of the Government mishandling of "Options for Change" will be hard on the regiments, they will be no less hard on the individual service men and women. Ministers would have done better to remember the stricture of Field Marshal Viscount Slim to his officers:

"You will put first the honour and interests of your country, and next the safety, well-being and comfort of your men."

The Secretary of State hopes that as much as possible of the 40,000 reduction will be achieved by natural wastage. Even allowing for that, there is no escaping the fact that a large proportion will have to be achieved through redundancies. We are therefore entitled to ask about the arrangements that the Government are making to help service men and women made redundant to find a secure place in civilian life. The answer to that question is not encouraging—the Government have not made any proposal to offer service men and women a better quality of pre-release training, despite being urged to do so by the Labour party. There is not even the slightest sign that they are thinking about doing so. That is disgraceful in the economic climate that the Government have created and in which ex-service men and women will have to live when they are thrown out of the Army. Governments used to wash their hands of responsibility for soldiers once they left the forces. The present Government apparently intend to wash their hands of soldiers while they are still in the forces, before they are thrown out.

The situation is even worse in respect of housing provision for ex-service men and women, who are disadvantaged in two ways. There is a low percentage of home ownership in the Army, particularly among

ordinary soldiers, and, having moved around frequently, the ordinary soldier will not receive high priority on a council house waiting list. In any event, waiting lists are longer than ever, and housebuilding at lower levels than ever, since the Government came to power.

What do the Government propose to do about those 40,000 of their brave young lads and lasses, of whom they like to speak so proudly, when they are thrown out without a job or home?

The Government should have at least made a decision—and I am glad to announce that they have done so. The Government have decided to do nothing. They are not even discussing with local authorities the problems that will inevitably arise—as the Minister of State made clear to me in replies to my parliamentary questions. There are no proposals either to utilise vacant land or empty properties owned by the Ministry of Defence. This is the same Government who castigate local authorities for leaving properties vacant.

Currently, the MOD owns 2,527 acres of vacant land that could be used for low-cost housing. We only ask that the Ministry considers doing so. Also, according to a parliamentary answer given last year, 16·3 per cent. of the 76,068 married quarters owned by the MOD were vacant, 5·4 per cent. of them for more than one year—and the Government love to castigate Lambeth council over precisely the same kind of figures. Of the 1,790 civilian properties owned by the MOD, 12.5 per cent. were vacant, and 6·7 per cent. of those had been empty for more than six years.

I quote those statistics to highlight the inactivity of the hierarchy within the Ministry of Defence when it comes to protecting the quality of life of our soldiers and of those likely to find themselves made redundant. Perhaps the Government's indecision and indifference should not surprise us.

I am glad that the Minister of State clarified tonight his remarks concerning the payment of compensation to the three young Grenadiers who were unfortunately injured. His clarification was useful, because many of us were horrified at his reported comments—but I accept that they were taken out of context. However, I say in all sincerity to the Minister that he should not be so defensive, because when he is, it can sound—even though the right hon. Gentleman might not mean this—as though he is accusing people who have been extremely badly injured of trying to profit from their injuries. I am glad that there is some movement in that regard, and I look forward to considerable sympathy being shown to those young men when the proposed meeting takes place.

In almost every sphere, and at almost every level, the performance of the Secretary of State and of his Ministers over the past year, and in respect of "Options for Change", has been woefully inadequate.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the hon. Gentleman now answer fully the question put to him earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, because he only answered part of it? The hon. Gentleman accepted, as my right hon. Friend's question implied, that Labour has not undertaken—or could not undertake—any review of Britain's defence strategy. However, the hon. Gentleman did not say whether Labour has already decided on the level of its defence budget—that is, that it would be one third less than the present budget.

Dr. Reid: This may be difficult for the hon. Gentleman to grasp, but the whole purpose of a review is to review matters. If one draws conclusions at the beginning of a review, there is little point in undertaking a review. We make two pledges. First, we will spend whatever is necessary to defend Britain. Secondly, that expenditure will be based on a strategic analysis—a full defence review—within the next year, within the first six months of the incoming Labour Government.

That is in stark contrast to the performance of the present Secretary of State and his Ministers. At the level of analytical review, they have gone absent without leave. At the level of procurement and finance, they are in a shambles. At the level of force structures, they have passed the buck in the most craven fashion to the Army itself. At the level of service conditions, they have shown an indifference exceeded only by their indecision.

If the Secretary of State and his Ministers were judged by the same criteria that they set for soldiers, they would not proceed beyond page 32 of the "British Military Doctrine", which sets out the three elements of fighting power. They are the conceptual component—the thought process; the physical component—the means to fight; and the moral component—motivation, leadership, and management.

The present Government fail abysmally in respect of all three. At a conceptual level, they are unable, unwilling, or incapable—or perhaps all three—of undertaking the necessary review and analysis that is an essential prerequisite of any fundamental change. At a physical level, they have abysmally failed in their projected expenditure targets for the 1990s, and in the provision of rational procurement for the present. At the moral level, they have abrogated leadership, provided no motivation, and have undermined morale.

It is almost 400 years since Cardinal Richelieu remarked that history knows of many more armies ruined by want and disorder than by the efforts of their enemies. Almost four centuries later, the Government have set out to prove Richelieu correct. After all that, the British Army is entitled to ask, "With friends like the Government, who needs enemies?"

6.26 pm

Mr. George Younger (Ayr): I strongly associate myself with the tribute that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces paid to the conduct of our soldiers, sailors and airmen during the Gulf war. There is no doubt that the sheer quality of the British Army was shown up for its absolute completeness, and I congratulate all involved on the excellent job that they did. I refer not only to the troops at the front line but to the attention paid to staff training, which clearly paid off in a big way, because logistic support was a major factor in our success. I am also pleased that the Challenger tanks performed well, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend also on the recent decision to choose the Challenger again. I am sure that Challenger 2 will be a first-class tank, and one that will sell well in many parts of the world.

I strongly disagree with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Ministers. If the Gulf war had gone wrong, and if Britain's involvement had been badly conducted, we would be blaming them. As it is, it is only right that we should congratulate my right

[Mr. George Younger]

hon. Friend and all his colleagues on the superb job that they did in beginning Britain's involvement at the right time, and in the right place.

Dr. Reid: I would not want the wrong impression to be created. I did not cast any aspersions against the Secretary of State's leadership during the Gulf war. I am happy to place on record my gratitude for the way in which the Secretary of State and his Ministers conducted themselves. If anything, it was the Secretary of State who chose to make the war a divisive issue. Despite the contributions made by some Back-Benchers and others, I refused to sink to that level of personal criticism during the Gulf war.

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. It may be that I was swept up by the hyperbole and overstatement that characterised the rest of the hon. Gentleman's speech. It seemed that he was criticising my right hon. Friend and his Ministers for everything. I am glad to learn that that was not the case, because my right hon. Friends deserve great credit for their conduct.

In turning to "Options for Change" and the proposed Army reductions, I hope that I will be constructive in suggesting to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of State the best possible way of completing the process that they have started.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Motherwell, North about the process being wrong. My right hon. Friends have put in a great deal of extremely good work. The fact that they carried on doing so during the Gulf war is a remarkable achievement, and I pay tribute to them for it.

I have great sympathy for Ministers when they tackle such an enormously difficult task as a reduction of this size in the Army. No enterprise could be more difficult, in military terms, than trying to do it at this time. However, I must tell my right hon. Friend the Minister that my sympathy for and realisation of the difficulties does not mean that I believe that Ministers do not have to listen to suggestions or criticisms which they think must be partial. There is a lot to be learned from people who have comments to make on the matter. The problems of reduction have to be faced, and I know of no one in any part of the forces, or among their supporters, who says that reductions are wrong. Everyone knows that it has to happen. The question is how. How can it be done acceptably, in a way that we can support and understand?

My constituents have brought the Scottish point of view and their concerns to my notice. Within the Scottish division there is enormous concern about how the problem is being tackled, which is not surprising because it is the best-recruited division against its establishment and has been for some time. Sad as it is, we must recognise that that is against a background where a large number of Army units are not able to get anything like up to establishment. I understand that 15 battalions are undermanned by more than 100 men and 20 are undermanned by more than 70 men. None of those is in the Scottish division, and I hope that that will be borne in mind.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should not try to strengthen the weak regiments by weakening the strong and that any across-the-board cuts would be very unfair to the Scottish regiments? We should enjoy the strength of Scottish recruitment and retain those regiments.

Mr. Younger: Perhaps it would help to speed the debate if I were to sit down, saying that the hon. Gentleman has made my speech for me, but he has not quite.

The Scottish division made a great commitment to the Gulf war—relatively, its commitment was greater than that of any other part of the Army. It is true to say that all those commitments were met by the Scottish battalions without any support or extra reinforcement, and few of the other parts of the Army could say the same.

The Scottish divisions have been excellent at recruiting and retention, which is just as important, and that should also be borne in mind. I am showing why there is concern and how we should tackle it. The Scottish division, in common with many others, has lost many important parts already. About 20 years ago we lost the Cameronians and it is interesting to note that recruiting in Lanarkshire has been difficult ever since and has never been up to average. There were two difficult amalgamations: the Camerons and the Seaforths, which have become the Queen's Own Highlanders; and the Royal Scots Fusiliers, which came from my constituency, with the Highland Light Infantry, which have become the Royal Highland Fusiliers. Both are extremely successful and happy regiments, but it was a difficult amalgamation.

Good recruiting in those conditions is a vital resource which we have far too little of. Many parts of the Army are suffering because they are unable to recruit enough men. The Scottish division does not have that problem, and I hope that that will be remembered.

Apart from the Scottish division, there is the question of the Scots Guards because if a reduction is made there it could affect Scottish manpower and also the second Royal Tank Regiment and the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards which recruit from Scotland and have already been amalgamated.

Mr. Ted Garrett: I fully concur with the right hon. Gentleman in his concern about the Scottish division. However, I believe that during his time as a Minister he allowed the young soldiers recruitment depot to be moved from the Bridge of Don down to Northumberland, yet there was little outcry about it. The young soldiers' morale could not have been very high when they moved them into Northumberland without even considering the matter.

Mr. Younger: I remember that very well. The hon. Gentleman is right and we were considerably concerned about the transfer at the time. However, I understand that it has gone very happily, which is a good thing.

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): I understand my right hon. Friend's important argument about recruiting for the Scottish regiments. Does he agree that one of the great worries affecting the British Army is what will happen to regiments after the review? Will quality of performance and excellence be the end product? We will have a much smaller Army and therefore it must be a much more excellent Army. That is what is worrying many soldiers who want to continue.

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State deserves great credit for the firm statement by the Secretary of State when he said that he believes in and supports the

regimental system. My right hon. Friend repeated that today. There is no doubt that in large part the intensely high quality of the British Army is due to the regimental system, and the Secretary of State deserves great credit for that.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the interesting aspects of previous amalgamations between regiments—up to six regiments have amalgamated in the south-east—is that one can rebuild esprit de corps and regimental commitment in the larger units?

Mr. Younger: I agree, as some of the amalgamations have been extremely successful. However, one cannot recreate the ability to recruit in certain areas and that is vital, that is what the Army lacks in many places and needs, and it is something that the regiments that I mentioned can produce.

I have mentioned that aspect only to show why there is concern and will now move to the constructive part of my speech. Difficult decisions have to be faced, and in no way can my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wave a magic wand so that he does not have to take any of them. However, he must have backing and support, and he needs to do two things to get them. First, he must convince us all that the total figure that we are supposed to be reducing the Army to will be able to cope with future commitments. Secondly, when the reductions are decided and have begun, they must have an understandable and defensible basis. When one is doing something that people do not approve of, one cannot say to them, "I'm sorry, I can't produce a rational reason for this. It's just going to happen."

There is widespread doubt that 36 infantry battalions is anything like enough to carry out future commitments without being overstreched. It is difficult for those of us who are not intimately involved in drawing up the arms plot to spell out the figures. We must rely upon Ministers to help us out. There is no doubt that there is enormous concern among those who have operated the system and that is what convinces me that it is a real problem. Those people who understand about the arms plot understand how difficult it is for understrength battalions, those which have too heavy a programme and those which have not had enough leave to get the job done—the problem of overstretch.

Among people who know about such technical matters, and I do not claim to be one of them, there is a lot of doubt. If I understand what the Secretary of State said, we will have to produce two divisions of three brigades each for NATO's rapid reaction force—one at home and one in the British Army of the Rhine—which works out at 12 infantry battalions. In Northern Ireland we have to provide about 10 battalions—sometimes 11 and sometimes nine—and we all know that a tour in Northern Ireland requires longer than the five or six months of the tour because some battalions are preparing to go, some are recovering after they come back, and leave and retraining must be taken into consideration. The actual commitment could be half as much again.

We have many other commitments as well. We have a battalion in Belize; we do not know how long that will go on. We have part of a battalion in the Falklands, and one and a half in Cyprus. If we add the battalions in the air mobile brigade to the total of 36, we find that only three are left to carry out the entire home defence role.

The Secretary of State has said that the home defence requirement will not change substantially. My arithmetic may be suspect, but I quickly reached a total of more than 36 battalions. I shall be relieved if I am told that I am wrong, but I should certainly like an explanation. It is desperately important that we do not commit ourselves now to that figure of 36 until we are sure that we are not overstretching our resources.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the current doubts about whether the detente between east and west has become firm enough for us to make such reductions. I do not consider that a reason for not starting to make them in the first place, but it is, I think, a reason for us to take measured steps rather than committing ourselves immediately to such a low total.

As I have said, my right hon. Friend should take a second criterion into account. When the decisions have to be made, they will of course be painful, and many people will find some of them distressing. I entirely sympathise; we must be able to give each person a credible reason. I can think of only one that would hit home when unpalatable decisions had to be made. People would have to be told, "The regiment about which you are concerned cannot produce the necessary numbers, and has not been able to do so for some time. It is so understretched that we doubt whether it will be able to recover. Sadly, it will have to go."

At present, the rest of the Army is carrying the battalions that are below strength. According to personal accounts that I have been given, someone who is stationed with the next-door battalion, which may have only two companies, will in practice do more duties, even if nothing is said to that effect.

It is vital that the 36 battalions—or whatever the new number will be—are at full strength. The only way to achieve that is to go for the areas that, year in, year out, have the best recruitment and retention levels. I could defend that position anywhere; I should be as happy as it is possible to be to explain it to the colonel of a regiment that must go, and to say, "I am very sorry, but it makes sense to me." What I could not do is tell the commander of a fully recruited battalion with excellent potential, "I am sorry, but the powers that be are going to turn you out."

I intended my suggestions to be constructive; I hope that they will help my right hon. Friend.

6.43 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I agree with much of what the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) has said. I took comfort from his arithmetic—not least because, in his new life, he is chairman of the institution with which I bank. I was able to feel confident to some extent that that institution and my modest resources were in sound hands.

I was also interested by the right hon. Gentleman's reference to the amalgamation of the Highland Light Infantry with the Royal Scots Fusiliers. As he said, it has resulted in a very effective and happy regiment. The amalgamation itself, however, was by no means happy. My illustrious father-in-law, who was colonel of the Highland Light Infantry, was compelled to resign—as, indeed, was the colonel of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The resulting unhappiness lasted for some time.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

I cannot escape a sense of frustration: we are making judgments, and commenting on the quality of decisions, at a time when we do not have before us a properly laid-out strategic framework in which the Government can operate their defence policy in the next five or 10 years. The Minister was at pains to deny that the proposals were Treasury-led, but he has found it difficult to persuade the Select Committee that they are not. A good deal of circumstantial evidence leads to the belief that much of what is now under consideration derives from a desire to find savings in the defence budget, rather than from a careful analysis of what is needed and what resources are required to meet our commitments.

All parties in the House are committed to reductions in defence expenditure but all those commitments were entered into before the events of 2 August last year. In each case, they were based on a number of assumptions: first, that there would be an early implementation of the conventional forces in Europe agreement; secondly, that the extension of democracy in the Soviet Union would proceed smoothly; and, thirdly—perhaps the most significant assumption—that there was little likelihood of British forces' having to fight a war outside the NATO area in the foreseeable future.

All three of those assumptions proved to be invalid. The first is coming to pass, but not without considerable difficulty, owing to the eddy and ripple of military influence being exerted on Mr. Gorbachev by the red army —an influence that may yet prove more decisive and independent than the tawdry intimidation of Lithuanians in their own country, as the Institute of Strategic Studies, at least, acknowledged in its recently published book "Strategic Review 1990-91".

I do not believe that we should engage in this debate without a clear indication of the Government's long-term proposals. "Options for Change" is not a defence review; Ministers go to great lengths to emphasise that. So far, it consists of the statement made by the Secretary of State approximately 12 months ago, with an attached list of the resources that we have now and what we might be reduced to, along with decisions that have been announced since then.

I find it very difficult to test properly the Secretary of State's announcement of the reductions in Army numbers without a clear understanding of the tasks that those men and women will be expected to undertake. Much of what the right hon. Member for Ayr said struck me as self-evident, and—despite, perhaps, his efforts to avoid it —seemed to make formidable criticism of the position adopted by the Government so far. That is hardly surprising: although he was probably too modest to say so, the right hon. Gentleman has considerable experience of fighting a rearguard campaign to ensure that a local regiment is not disbanded. The "Save the Argylls" campaign is still remembered in Scotland as a popular expression of public feeling that had a direct political consequence.

When, on 3 June, the Secretary of State announced his proposed cuts in the Army, he was criticised by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) for delaying such action. To some extent, that criticism has been repeated this evening: there have been accusations of indecision and dithering.

I do not charge Ministers with delaying; I charge them with haste. They have made decisions and announcements without having reached a set of strategic conclusions that they could share with the House. It is true that uncertainty is damaging to morale, but it cannot be more damaging than flawed certainty. There is a substantial risk that some of the certainty that is being demonstrated contains assumptions that are invalid and judgments that, essentially, are flawed.

What are the Government's plans for reserve forces, and I use that expression in its generic sense? This is not a time for cliche-ridden pleasantries about their contribution. I shall try to set out my stall for the principles that should be taken into account. Logic demands that if reductions are made in the professional Army, there should not automatically be parallel, similar proportional reductions in reserve forces. Logic also demands that if reductions are made in the professional Army, more reliance will almost certainly have to be placed, potentially and perhaps in actuality, on reserve forces. Reserve forces on whom greater reliance may be necessary require to be trained and equipped to perform at a higher level, and at a level that might take them into the front line. Reserve forces who may find themselves in the front line must be so well trained and equipped that they can, with a minimum of disruption, fit in with professional forces.

Those propositions seem self-evident. They do not seem to be embraced by the suggestion that one should simply make a flat-rate percentage cut in the allocation of resources to our reserve forces. I ask the Minister to consider this question, which I hope crystallises the points that I have made. Do the Government undertake that in their treatment of reserve forces they will apply the principles to which I have referred and not be seduced by a simplistic percentage formula, the purpose of which is merely to obtain financial savings?

There must be lessons to be learned from the Gulf. The success of the helicopter surely shows the need for an end to the uncertainty about the procurement of the Apache aircraft. The conclusion that no ground army could have withstood the aerial bombardment to which the Iraqi forces were subject, which has substantial support, underlines the close relationship between air and land resources and the extent to which the effectiveness of those on the ground, however well equipped or trained, is prejudiced if inadequate air power is available.

We know that tanks proved to be extremely effective, but we cannot ignore the self-evident problems of moving them from Germany to the theatre in which they are to operate. To some extent, we were fortunate that Saudi Arabia had extensive port facilities, not least at Al-Jubayl, which might not be replicated in other circumstances where we sought to deploy such armour.

But it is on regiments that, I suspect, much of the debate will turn. I shall not be the first or the last to say that. The Government have seriously miscalculated the consequences of indiscriminate disbandments and amalgamations. That is why I was so impressed by what the right hon. Member for Ayr said. We know that the regimental system is central to the organisation of the Army. I think that it was being suggested that, to some extent, the system was established in the 19th century. I think that Secretary of State Childers and his immediate successor were responsible for a reorganisation then, but the regimental system had existed for many hundreds of years before that.

We know that regiments have a special place in the affection and loyalty of the communities from which they recruit. It is not only retired generals who feel strongly about these matters. I received rather an emotional letter from the widow of someone who had served in a Scottish regiment. She now lives in my constituency, and she said that the regiment was one of the things of which her husband, who served in the ranks, was most proud throughout his life. She kept his medals because it reminded her of the tremendous affection and loyalty that he had for his regiment. It is not only generals or colonels who are anxious about the continuance of regiments with which they have been associated.

In considering which regiments may have to be reduced, we must have regard to those that have recruited and retained best. The Scottish regiments fulfil those criteria. I am urged by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) that Welsh regiments also fulfil those criteria. I feel a deep sense of unease that the Government have seen fit to leave it to the Army to make proposals on the cuts. That may be described as consultation, but the perception is that responsibility for the decision has been handed to the Army. That is an unwitting dereliction of ministerial duty. These are matters for ministerial decision, not for Army decision. If the Scottish colonels are correctly reported as having declined to do the job that was urged on them, I believe that they were right to do so. Indeed, they may have been constitutionally right to do so. When such decisions are made, they are inevitably political, and responsibility should neither be diluted nor devolved.

Last year, we paid tribute, as is customary on these occasions, to the bravery and professionalism of the men and women of the Army. When we did so, I doubt whether many believed that within 12 months those men and women would be exposed to such challenges and risks as many of them faced in the Gulf. I hope that, like me, you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were impressed and proud of the announcement of the awards to those who served in the Gulf. It was eloquent testimony to their bravery and skill.

This year, because of the example of our forces in the Gulf, we can renew that tribute to their bravery and professionalism with redoubled conviction. But there are others who almost daily must show great courage, matched with great restraint. I speak, as some may suspect, of those who serve in Northern Ireland. I doubt whether Northern Ireland is regarded as a glamorous posting, although there is strong evidence to suggest that many who serve in the Army look forward to it as it is an opportunity to put into practice the skills that they have acquired and to show their commitment in a practical way to the Crown. They deserve our support and recognition, and, as long as their presence in Northern Ireland continues to be necessary, a debate such as this should not take place without their contribution being properly recognised.

6.59 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) referred to 1 July and the battle of the Somme and rightly reminded us of the sacrifices that have been made by the British Army and the valour, courage and proficiency that it has shown. I, too, would like to pay a tribute not only to past generations but, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, to those who are serving in the Army today.

I suggest, however, that in the first world war it was the predecessor of Kitchener's citizens' army, the 100,000 strong all-volunteer regular Army who fought in the concluding months of 1914, who offer a lesson that is more relevant to our experience today. After three months, they were virtually decimated, but in the face of overwhelming odds they slowed up and eventually stopped the Kaiser's army. In the last few weeks of that campaign, what helped to stem the tide, and therefore made the basis of the allied offensive possible, were the forces of the Territorial Army, who supported what was left of the regular British expeditionary force. That small army of 100,000 was highly trained. Its soldiers used their weapons with such proficiency that the German generals thought that they were equipped with machine guns, although in reality they had far too few of them. Their morale was second to none, and we all admire their sense of duty.

Those forces were supported by the Territorial Army; they were all volunteers; and they were highly trained—ingredients which many of us have emphasised as the qualities that must be retained if we are to make a success of "Options for Change".

I am now speaking under the 10-minute rule, and I know that many right hon. and hon. Members are anxious to speak. I shall make my points, although too briefly to do them justice.

I warmly support the regimental system, which is fundamental to the morale, sense of duty and proficiency of the Army, especially the infantry. It would be unwise of me to go into which units should or should not be retained or into how many should be amalgamated or even disbanded.

I should like to put a point to the military specialists, the professionals, who will have the unenviable task of making recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, although I imagine that the Government, not the generals, will make the decisions. Will the professionals consider retaining at least a cap badge at company level or, if that is thought unworkable, keeping a regimental tie with those reserve units which are expected to play a combat role at short notice? Time will not permit me to elaborate, but I believe that that is probably the most workable of the suggestions which I have heard.

It has been argued that the changes proposed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State do not bear any relationship to our military needs or strategy and that the figures produced for the three services, especially the Army, have been plucked out of the air and are almost entirely Treasury driven.

I have some reservations about the Government's proposals, but if the implication is that they have little to do with the threat to our security, I beg to differ. We played a constructive part in the review of NATO strategy. We cannot have a series of individual national defence reviews. That does not work any more. We are all part of an integrated command. Britain alone cannot come up with a defence review and think that that will provide for its defence or for national interests. There must be a collective and international system involving the closest friends and allies.

The trust and confidence built up in the NATO process have served us well. I do not accept that there is a need for

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

a purely national defence review. Once we have agreed the figures with our allies—I believe that the cuts make some sense—we have a duty to consider how they can be implemented within the broad parameters of the NATO defence review.

The United States believes that it should cut the size of its armed forces in Europe by 50 per cent., compared with 30 per cent. for Germany and 20 per cent. for Britain, of which a large portion will be borne by the Army. The changes mainly involve the NATO central front, in which the Army plays a greater part. If our commitment to the central front is substantially reduced, it follows that, much as one may regret it, the Army will be called to bear a greater burden than the Royal Air Force or the Navy.

On grounds of logic and military sense, the Government are right to point out that there has already been a review. From that review has emerged a role for Britain for which no other country could be better suited. The new NATO strategy fits in with the Army's traditional role, recognising that the massive Soviet presence in eastern Europe is withdrawing, that East Germany is now part of the Germany bundeswehr, that the Warsaw pact is being disbanded and that there will no longer be troops almost muzzle to muzzle glaring at each other across a division of about 150 miles. For the first time since the end of world war two, the bulk of our Army, with all its dependants, will no longer be stationed in Germany, at great expense.

The new NATO strategy will emphasise flexibility and mobility, which could not be better suited to an all-volunteer Army. We have been relieved of the prospect of fighting, as part of a mass of land forces in continental Europe, one of those old-style clashes of continental armies. That analysis may be incorrect, although I believe that it is the best one. I am comforted by the thought that Germany, the United States, France—although it is not part of NATO—and the rest of our allies agree that that is probably a reasonable scenario. An outbreak of hostilities involving the Soviet Union is not thought likely to occur in the foreseeable future. If it did, we would have available nuclear weapons and the capability of the Air Force and our sea forces.

In those circumstances, the proposed cuts are probably about right, but that leads me to my caveats. The strategy should not work on the cheap; if it is on the cheap, it will not work. It will break down if we believe that the Army can do the job without the best possible equipment. Compared with the continental armies, ours is small. There is a risk that it is too small. That can be overcome only by Ministers meeting the wishes which have been expressed today.

We must emphasise that the proposed force can discharge its new role effectively only if it is "meaner"—to use the word bandied about the Ministry of Defence. Flexibility involves airborne troops and other specialised troops, especially those trained in amphibious landings and equipped to operate in difficult terrain. For the force to fulfil its role, better equipment and rigorous and more realistic training are needed. As the force is on the small side, if it is to perform its tasks, particularly in Northern Ireland, the obligations which I have spelt out must be met.

My last point is also a warning. We must pay more attention to our reserve force. Because the size of the regular Army has been reduced and the world is still an uncertain place—I am not talking just about Europe and the Soviet Union—we must have reserve units which can easily be called out to fill any gaps.

Some people argue that that is a cheaper way of dealing with any unexpected troubles that arise. Whatever happens, it will cost money. Some may look for a big dividend from "Options for Change" and believe that we can go much further down the road of saving money. I remind them that, in 1984-85, 5·2 per cent. of our budget was spent on defence compared with an estimated 3·7 per cent. in 1992-93, according to the public expenditure White Paper.

If we are to discharge our duties in the way that I have outlined, and if we recognise that we cannot fulfil expectations of making great economies in the armed services, we shall be able to fulfil our duties as laid down and agreed by us in NATO.

However, I emphasise the role of the Territorial Army, which in 1914 supported the first 100,000. It supported the regulars against the Kaiser's army and helped to stem the tide. That is a lesson that we should never forget.

7.9 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I also congratulate our forces who were in the Gulf. They were professional and brave, and we were all relieved that the conflict was short.

However, I very much regret the Minister's remarks in which he tried to misrepresent the role of the Labour party during the Gulf war. We wanted every effort to be made to ensure that a war was avoided and that peaceful measures should be tried first. I, in my innocence, thought that that was exactly what the Government were purporting to do. Once the die had been cast Labour Members, led by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, went time after time into the Division Lobby in support of our troops. The burden of the Minister's remarks showed that he failed to recognise the overwhelming support from all parties for our troops once they were at war. That was very churlish of him, and I want to put the record straight.

In the few minutes that I have at my disposal I want to follow the speech of the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) who is also a former Minister of Defence. It is a long time—21 years—since I was a Defence Minister. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the importance of the regimental system. There must be something in it. That may not sound tidy to the civil service mind, but the regiments are important blocks for building the modern infantry in this century as in previous ones. The system has lasted a long time and is based on local loyalty, on families and friends who join a particular unit because their forebears did the same.

There is a marvellous Welsh word that I shall spell out for the convenience of the House. Cynefin means affinity to one's habitat and ties to one's area. It is a major plus factor in times of stress, when the chips are down and our forces are in battle. That idea may not commend itself to the tidy civil service mind, but it is reflected in recruitment, certainly in the Principality, and in other parts of the country.

We are facing a period of cuts, and I have always accepted—as most hon. Members now accept—that we must reap the benefits of the peace dividend and of the

general warming of relations. It is important that if the rationalisation and the restructuring are to happen, it must be on a fair basis. I was disturbed by the Minister's remark to the effect that the Army should be left to get on with it. Nothing similar has been said about washing one's hands of the issue. It is a constitutional decision for Ministers to take. The Army should decide on the minutiae and the niceties. No amount of Pontius Pilate-like washing of hands will get Ministers out of this difficulty. It is for them to decide; they are answerable to the House and they must take into account all the factors, including history, tradition and their political answerability to the House.

We do not know what criteria will be used, and that fact has been echoed in many speeches today. As the right hon. Member for Ayr asked, will recruitment be an important factor? We know that some regiments are undermanned, but in Wales—and in other parts of the country—we are able to recruit and man its three regiments of foot.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): And more.

Mr. Morris: And more. We may lose one regiment of the line—like other parts of the country, we have also suffered cuts. I am old enough to remember the South Wales Borderers and the First Welsh Regiment leaving. I had the privilege of serving with them as I have also done with the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Wales has suffered cuts and has lost many major military establishments, which resulted in a loss of local employment. We want to know what the political criteria will be. Can we be assured of fairness? Will recruitment be considered important? In view of recruitment in Wales and of the past cuts, I believe that there is a strong case for Wales to maintain its three regiments of the line.

What are the current proposals? Like all those who take an interest in these matters, I have heard that a suggestion emanated from a meeting of generals and colonels of regiments at which those representing Wales were heavily outnumbered that the Royal Welch Fusiliers should be amalgamated with the Cheshires. I have never heard such a ridiculous and politically inept proposal. Thirty to 40 per cent. of the Royal Welch Fusiliers are Welsh speakers. Does anyone believe that if the oldest Welsh regiment disappears people will flock to join the Cheshires? That is nonsense. If recruitment means anything, there must be a political input into this major decision.

I do not know what the input of the Welsh Office is. When individuals and organisations have been to see the Secretary of State for Wales they have received a pretty dusty, non-committal answer. He, unhappily, serves two masters. He represents Wales, in theory, but he has his Cheshire constituency at heart. He does not believe that there is any great difference between those interests because people cross the border. He has allowed his Cheshire responsibilities to come first.

There is a problem with the Royal Welch Fusiliers because we were outnumbered at a gathering where there were more English than Welsh and because the Welsh Office did not speak out. The Minister of State announced to the *Western Mail* a fortnight ago that he was in charge. He said that everyone from the Queen down knows that he is acting as Secretary of State for Wales. This is his great opportunity to speak up and to do something for Wales.

The suggested amalgamation is reprehensible. The Army would suffer, Wales would suffer and it would be disastrous if recruitment were not recognised as an important factor. The least that the Minister can do is to tell us what the criteria will be. The House should know, so that we can judge before the die is cast. The issue is too big to be left to the generals. There should be a political input and a political decision. The Government cannot wash their hands of an important regiment which has served the country well and which I hope will continue to serve it in the future.

7.18 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Every right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken has rightly praised the enormous skill and courage with which the Army has in the past year carried out its role in Iraq and in Northern Ireland. Those two names—Iraq and Northern Ireland—remind us that the world is still a very dangerous place despite the collapse of international communism during the past few years.

The nature of the threat has changed, and it is possible to make substantial cuts in the defence budget. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced that the size of the Army was to be reduced by about 25 per cent., I did not object. I think that there is room for a reduction in the size of the Army, especially as, for the first time since the end of world war two, it will basically be returning to this country. For the first time since the war, more than 50 per cent. of trained soldiers will be serving in the United Kingdom. That means that we ought to be able make substantial cuts in the administrative tail of the Army.

In Germany, we need major hospitals and big supply depots, but we shall not need them once the Army returns to this country. The means that we should be able to make disproportionately large cuts—within the 25 per cent.—in the administrative tail.

It is astonishing, therefore, that larger than average cuts are proposed for our combat units. Infantry battalions are ideally suited to provide a flexible response to the uncertain threats that we shall face in future. I was astonished to learn that it is proposed to cut our infantry from 55 battalions to 36, of which two will be Gurkha battalions. That means that there will be only 34 British battalions left.

The senior officers who have to plan are clearly unhappy, and some of them have said, "It will not work." Unlike, say, the Green Jackets, or the Airborne division or the Argylls, the Queen's division is not made up of prima donnas. The Queen's division is at the heart of our infantry. The council of colonels of the Queen's division "question the viability of an Infantry of only 34 British Battalions in the light of what they perceive to be the commitments".

What can be done? First, I suggest that the Gurkhas should be taken out of the "Options for Change" exercise. I do not believe that they should be disbanded. We should keep a brigade of 4,000 Gurkhas, but as the basis for a United Nations force. There is a need for a United Nations force in northern Iraq at this moment and, in the near future, there may well be a need for such a force in Cambodia. There has also been a collapse of authority in Somalia; aid workers have had to leave because there was no one there to protect them. The Gurkhas could provide the basis of an ever-ready United Nations force. There is much interest in the concept of a United Nations standby force given the thawing of the cold war, and Britain should play a role in developing such a force.

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

Secondly—and here I admit to an element of special pleading—I think that it is crazy to cut the third battalion and the regimental headquarters of the Parachute Regiment. If we are to play a leading role in the rapid reaction force, it is plainly barmy to reduce the size of the Parachute Regiment. There will also undoubtedly be an extra need for special forces to tackle the terrorist threat in the years to come. We should remember that about 70 per cent. of the Special Air Service and more than 50 per cent. of the special forces as a whole are recruited from the Parachute Regiment. To dry up the recruitment pool for our special forces does not seem to make any sense—except, perhaps, under a policy of equal misery for all.

Thirdly, the 36 front-line battalions should be supplemented by a force of perhaps 10 base battalions in a lower state of readiness—perhaps with some reserves with special training and call-out liabilities on their strength—which could be reconstituted in 30 to 60 days to support the 36 front-line infantry battalions that would be kept up to 100 per cent. strength and receive the best possible training. The existence of "hybrid base battalions" could act as an insurance against the problem of overstretch which, under present plans, will undoubtedly face the Army.

The Secretary of State and his colleagues earned warm plaudits from the House for their conduct during the Gulf war. It would be a tragedy for them, and for the country as a whole, if they went down in the history books as Ministers who broke the back of the British infantry.

7.26 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I echo the tributes to the Army, its leadership and its training; they are superb. In the time at my disposal, however, I can choose only one theme. I shall concentrate on disabled service men and ex-service men. I welcome the Minister's comment about the three Grenadier guards whose solicitors are to meet representatives of the Ministry. I regard that as half a step forward, but only half a step. The Minister could simply have said that he accepted the principle that they would be paid. He has not done that yet, so they are not guaranteed compensation.

I want to raise again the problem of those ex-service men disabled by alleged negligence before the Crown Proceedings Act was changed in 1987. Unlike the Guardsmen, those ex-service men do not have the right to sue, nor do they receive compensation. It is scandalous that they should be left in limbo.

The House will know that between 1947 and 1987 members of the armed forces were banned from suing the Ministry of Defence for injuries due to alleged negligence. The House may recall the campaign that I led to change the law and abolish section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act which ended in victory. On 8 December 1986, the then Secretary of State—the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), who spoke from the Back Benches today—announced that the Government had decided to abolish section 10. There is no doubt that that was the result of the campaign. Subsequently the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) became an Act, and section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act was abolished.

Ironically, the very disabled ex-service men who had campaigned with me were denied the benefit and did not even receive an ex gratia benefit. Among those severely disabled service men was one of my constituents, Martin Ketterick, and Snowy Clingham, both of whom have become well known. Their loyalty for the services has never been doubted. However, they have felt betrayed.

As the Ministry of Defence remained intransigent, I contacted the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Her answer merely echoed that given by the MOD. I suggested to her that a trust fund should provide ex gratia payments for those ex-service men who were disabled before the law was changed before the announcement of 8 December 1986. I said that payments could go to those who could show evidence that their injuries were probably due to negligence.

However, the then Prime Minister said that the trust fund proposal did not surmount the principle of restrospection. She objected that an open-ended scheme would

"cause distress and embarrassment to former service men alleged to have caused injury to others."

I suggested a compromise to the then Prime Minister. I said that to avoid an open-ended commitment claims should be considered only from those injured in action which led to an official investigation and a conclusion of faulty behaviour, equipment or procedure. That was a very reasonable proposition. To overcome the problems of retrospection, I suggested that ex gratia payments should compensate only for costs and suffering experienced after the decisive date of 8 December 1986.

As a further attempt to solve the problems, I leaned over backwards and suggested to the then Prime Minister that the ex gratia payments should be based only on the written evidence available as that would undoubtedly rectify the major causes of injustice. Every one of those proposals was rejected by the right hon. Member for Finchley.

When the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister, I asked him to reconsider the issue. He said that the difficulties

"in principle and in practice"

were too great to act. The Government encountered difficulties

"in principle and in practice"

when they dealt with haemophiliacs who were infected with AIDS as a result of contaminated NHS blood transfusions. The Prime Minister found his way round that and commendably so. He should do precisely the same thing for disabled ex-service men. He should find his way round the problems and difficulties. They believe that the MOD's behaviour has caused difficulties and they believe that the Ministry has misled them.

Very few people inside or outside the House have heard of the "redress of grievance" procedure. However, when that campaign was at its height and when the disabled ex-service men were helping me, senior Ministers in the MOD told them about the procedure. It was suggested that the disabled ex-service men should divert their attention to that procedure. They took the Ministry at its word and they pursued the redress of grievance procedure.

Later, at exactly the same time that the Secretary of State for Defence announced in the House that the law was being changed, my constituents and the other ex-service

men were informed by the MOD that they were to receive nothing from the redress of grievance procedure. That was an astonishing way for the Ministry to act.

I want to ask the Minister several questions. Does he accept that Martin Ketterick and others were encouraged by the MOD to use the procedure to which I have referred? Did the MOD believe that that procedure would be successful for those ex-service men? If so, what caused the change of mind? Was the MOD familiar with the problems of those ex-service men? Did it understand them? Was it a coincidence that every campaigner was rejected? I would welcome answers to those questions later.

I remind the Minister that the Royal British Legion is committed to persuading the Government to give retrospective compensation. The soldiers', sailors' and airmen's association agrees with that, as does the Federation of Army Wives. There is a great body of responsible opinion in favour of that and hon. Members on both sides of the House want a fair deal for those ex-service men. I hope that the Secretary of State and/or the Prime Minister will reconsider those issues and do what they can for those ex-service men, who face a serious situation. A great injustice is being done. Unless some change can be made, that injustice will embitter future service men as well as the ex-service men. That is the last thing we want. I beg the Minister to reconsider, to change his mind and to give justice to those very loyal ex-service men.

7.36 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I feel like someone who has been queuing since Thursday for a ticket for Wimbledon. I am glad that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has seen it out with me, and I am grateful for his help on Thursday. I am also grateful for the presence of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement who, as always, is listening attentively to the debate.

What seems like a long wait is but a short time in comparison with the years of training that our armed forces have to undertake. Those long years of training are normally used only in a few hours. Having seen the way in which our armed forces acquitted themselves in the Gulf, we must be grateful for their work.

Our wait is nothing in comparison with the wait for the end of the cold war. It was gratifying to learn that the Warsaw pact was dissolved in Prague today. The Soviet Union has allowed its allies to go their separate ways, thus announcing the official end to the cold war.

I am sure that, like me, hon. Members on both sides of the House did the prize crossword in *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday. Interestingly, clue 11 across was:

"Where it costs nothing to live in non-communist countries?"

Of course, I need not tell hon. Members that the answer was, "the free world". We may be free, but the cost of remaining free is anything but cheap.

"Options for Change" has created much controversy in the House. Over the past few days, people have asked whether it should be Treasury-led or threat-led. We would be naive to believe that the Treasury does not have a role to play. However much people may try to hide it, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is looking for a 20 per cent. cut in defence expenditure over the next few years. The Labour party seems to want to hide the fact, but it is looking for a cut of at least one third, while the Liberals were clear about wanting a 50 per cent cut.

We could consider the threat aspect and ask the generals what they believe should be spent on defence. Any prudent general would say that we should be spending two or three times as much as we are spending now. However, we must be realistic. We already spend more than our European partners. Members of all parties are looking for a peace dividend. We must be ready to talk to our would-be opponents and reduce the threat and reduce the number of forces that we must put into the field.

I have not heard much about getting our armed forces into the right state to be able to fight. Much has been denied or swept under the carpet about our armoured corps within Germany. To get one third of those people in the field, I am told by people whom I trust that we effectively stripped our forces in Germany and we had about six months in which to do that. That cannot represent sensible economies. We must examine that matter.

There is no point in having forces who cannot fight; we might as well disband them. However, if we want them to fight, let us make sure that they are properly equipped. The MOD has taken that matter on board. The equipment budget is not being cut anywhere near as much as the manpower budget is being cut. We must learn the lessons, recruit people and fill regiments, and they must be suitable fighting forces.

I now refer to the MOD as a customer. We on this side of the House rightly want value for money, but we cannot expect the Vickers and Westlands of this world to give value for money unless they get clear statements from the MOD about what we want them to do and give them a timely order for the equipment that we have asked them to develop and produce. Delay costs money, and that money must be recouped by those companies or they will go out of business. Therefore, the money must come from the taxpayer. We must get it right.

We must also be careful about competitive tendering. It is all very well if we have half a dozen companies trying to make many different systems and the MOD, perhaps, buying two or three systems, but we often buy one-offs. It will be impossible to keep several companies with their own research, development and manufacturing capability. Therefore, we must be careful about how we deal with competitive tendering. We must take sensible decisions in the light of what we are trying to buy. Of course, if we buy boots or rifles for the Army, we buy a large number. That is very different from buying a frigate or a tank.

It is interesting to note that *The Daily Telegraph* today said that research facilities in the MOD should be cut and that perhaps the only things that we should bother to keep are radar and underwater weapons. My hon. Friend the Minister will know that I agree that there are problems, but *The Daily Telegraph* has got it wrong. We cannot expect the high level of defence research to be shared by many different companies. There are ways of managing that issue. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the next steps Defence Research Agency, but we must ensure that the DRA has the funds that it needs and that we are not duplicating research that is being done better by our allies. Clearly, when it comes to underwater weapons technology, we are well ahead of many of our allies, and certainly ahead of the Americans, who spend far more money on it. We must play to our strength.

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

I can give no credit for decision making in the MOD. As my hon. Friend knows, I was a management consultant in an earlier life and was often called in to examine decision-making procedures. I was close to many decisions in the Procurement Executive, whether in respect of land, air or sea systems controls. The MOD is run around in circles by civil servants. The Procurement Executive, which is incredibly labour-intensive, is not being put to good use. We must ensure that we have good value for money, that management decisions are made, and that, every time we suggest that we cut the number of people, we move them to one site. Co-location exercises, as my hon. Friend knows, outlast any Minister's term of office.

We saw that game with the quality assurance directive for more than a decade. I am sure that, in respect of the sea systems control group, which is already four years old, the so-called decision will not be made for another four years. I am quite sure that it can make it to the decade as well.

I tried to get the large, glossy copy of "Options for Change". We have a three-page list of what we are looking for. That is very good, but we should be discussing what we are committed to achieve. If we give them a set of equipment, our forces will try to achieve whatever we politicians tell them. Unless we make those decisions early, we are bound to get them wrong. In the past few days, we have discussed strategic issues—for example, should we have paratroops, or are paratroops obsolete? Should they be brought in by helicopter? What about amphibious lift? All those matters should be discussed in full. I refer also to the tank versus helicopter in respect of fire power, air versus land versus sea, and how those three aspects interact. How about technology versus manpower? Again, nobody seems to be talking about those points. We are all worried about which regiments will be kept or not kept. Frankly, that is not the issue.

When there was an announcement about a reduction in my junior leader's regiment in Bovington, I did not jump to my feet because I believe that we must look at all these things. Dorset must be careful not to try to grab too much or not to accept its share of cuts. However, the rapid deployment force should be based close to Dorset for many sensible reasons. I shall not list them as I have no time to do so. Dorset will do its bit. If we want a free world, we must be prepared to pay for it.

7.46 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I join hon. Members in paying tribute to our armed forces for their record of dedicated and disciplined service throughout their long history—from the tragic battle of the Somme, the 75th anniversary of which has already been mentioned today, to Operation Granby in the Gulf and, of course, still for 24 hours a day in Northern Ireland. History demonstrates that every nation requires armed forces and that a modern nation needs the shared security of regional alliances. It should surely be self-evident that the strength of those forces should be determined in proportion to the risk or threat that they may be required to confront.

I am happy to say that the threat of superpower confrontation and massive land assault in central Europe has gone, and thank God for that, but there are still plenty more residual risks that we require our armed forces to face up to. The risks remain. There is the obvious risk from the Soviet Union which still has massive forces—they are still being enhanced—on the northern flank of our NATO ally in Norway. Secondly, there is the mounting risk of direct or spillover conflict in eastern Europe, whether in Yugoslavia or in any of the other areas where economic, ethnic or religious pressures may be building. I suppose that we have some of those ethnic or quasi-religious pressures every day in Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, there is a probability of further need for United Nations-sponsored task forces to contain threats to international order "out of area", which could mean literally anywhere. Fourthly, by the same token, this world is full of risks of natural or unnatural disasters in which emergency relief can be most efficiently achieved with military logistics and military efficiency. That means volcanoes, floods, famine, the recent events in Kurdistan and so on.

Those are just some of the ongoing risks that we may expect our forces to be able to confront. I want to know whether the "Options for Change" exercise has included any assessment of any of those risks. What are the options? The term "options for change" implies that different choices have been put before Ministers and the House, but I do not think that hon. Members have been made aware of any of them.

Last year the Secretary of State for Defence announced a range of cuts to the strength of our forces. Since then our forces have been deployed to the Gulf and have played their part in winning a war and have then returned—but we are still waiting to hear about the specific options. Along with my colleagues on the Defence Select Committee I have been doing my best to evaluate such options as there may be. All of us are deeply suspicious that the Ministry of Defence is tailoring its perceptions of the risk of conflict to meet short-term financial restraints dictated by the Treasury. By all means let us have a peace dividend—I hope, a big one—but let us have a genuine and open assessment of the risks and options before we reach any firm decisions.

It would be reckless folly to carve up our armed forces in a way which would leave them without adequate means to perform the tasks that we are likely to have to ask them to carry out in future.

Just as the threat to the future of Rosyth naval base does not make sense in the context of the strategic environment, I suggest that MOD's approach to the review of the Army seems equally bereft of logic—especially its assessment of the future of Scotland's seven infantry battalions. I am not surprised that the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) have already mentioned that. It falls far short of military precision; it bears all the hallmarks of a crude Treasury carve up—and that should be exposed in this debate.

Early last month in anticipation of this debate I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him to publish a table showing

"(a) the nominal manpower establishment, (b) the actual manpower strength, (c) the percentage of nominal establishment achieved, (d) the number of recruits becoming available each year, and (e) the rate of retention of recruits and trained soldiers for each regiment and division in the British Army."

In the context of "Options for Change" these are fair questions to be asking. The answers to them are facts which any Minister should have at his fingertips before making decisions about the future of regiments and

battalions. It would be fairly silly to wind up successful regiments while maintaining units that have difficulty keeping themselves up to strength. But the Minister replied, after the usual holding answer,

"I will write to the hon. Member."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. *224*.]

Not surprisingly, I have not heard from the Minister on that question. Perhaps he does not know the answer; perhaps he does not want to know it. He certainly does not want Members of the House of Commons to know the answers to such questions in anticipation of a debate of this nature.

I am happy to say that I have been able to obtain some of the information from another source. The figures are not right up to date—they apply to the end of 1990—but they are near enough.

The information shows that the nominal establishment of the 50 infantry battalions in the British Army came to a total of 29,320 men, an average of 586 soldiers per battalion. The actual strength of the battalions totalled 26,408—a shortfall of 2,912. The recruitment and retention performance ranged from a deficiency of more than 17 per cent. in the Queen's division through to the —this is relatively fine tuning—deficiency of 3 per cent. in the Scottish division. Trends in recent years show that of the seven infantry divisions all but the Scots and the paratroops are struggling to recruit and retain the number of soldiers that they require. Surely that information should be taken into account in any "Options for Change" exercise.

It would be invidious to mention the names of the regiments concerned, but I see that one battalion in the Queen's division was 174 below strength; one in the Light division was 135 below strength; one in the Prince of Wales division was 120 below strength; one in the Guards division was 105 below strength; and one in the King's division was 100 below strength.

The contrasting range for the Scottish division was as follows: one battalion was at three above establishment and the worst was only 41 below establishment. I note that the Scottish division infantry training depot at Glencorse has the lowest adult recruitment wastage figure of all such depots in the British Army.

Mr. Ted Garrett: Has my hon. Friend taken into account the fact that the true numbers may be smaller than those that he has quoted because some of the soldiers are away from their battalions undergoing training?

Mr. Home Robertson: I understand that that has been taken into account, but since I do not have much time I shall not go into the point in detail.

Against this background of manifest difficulties in recruiting and retaining infantry, what is the sense of sacrificing flourishing battalions in the Scottish division? We should build on strength. The local regiments in Scotland have been through the process of cuts and amalgamations before. Any further cuts in the number of regionally-based regiments, with their enduring sense of local loyalty, could do lasting damage to the interests of the British Army; and they would, incidentally, deprive more than 100 young Scots each year of a respected and worth-while job opportunity, and of the training that goes with it. Further cuts would also make a great many people, including the right hon. Member for Ayr and myself, very angry indeed.

I am not surprised that the Scottish regiments have refused to play the Minister's game of Russian roulette. I share the personal feelings expressed by others, being the son of a member of the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Member of Parliament representing a large number of soldiers serving in the first battalion the Royal Scots, the first regiment of foot in the British Army, which has just distinguished itself again in the Gulf.

I am convinced that there is a continuing role for the Scottish infantryman in a world which still contains a wide range of risks. It would be reckless of the Minister to lose this valuable resource. We have become accustomed to the Government destroying national assets during their 12 years in office, but I hope that even they will not be daft enough to proceed with the threatened destruction of one third of the Scottish infantry division.

7.56 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): My right hon. Friend the Minister began by mentioning a reduction in the production of offensive weapons in the USSR. That is good news, but I am far from satisfied that it has gone far enough. The Soviets are still producing vast quantities of weaponry of the most sophisticated and modern type and we must be extremely vigilant if we are not to be outmanoeuvred.

I believe that "Options for Change" means assessing the minimum forces required and then establishing the best value for money for achieving that aim. We have been told that the present Army establishment of 156,000 is to be reduced to 116,000—a significant reduction. We must pay particular attention to the good value for money given by the Territorial Army. A Territorial soldier costs on average one sixth of his regular counterpart. So instead of thinking of reducing the TA's numbers—I listened with interest to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)—we should recognise that it is very good value for money. We should think of increasing its numbers.

I was delighted to hear the Minister say that 1,700 reservists served in the Gulf, of whom 1,000 came from the Army. As recently as 12 June this year his noble Friend claimed that only 572 served there, which caused a great deal of resentment in the Territorial Army, because it was responsible for training the people who may have gone on to S-type engagements. If they had not been trained by the TA they would not have been equipped to go on such engagements in the first place—so we must give the TA credit for that, and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend did so.

Nevertheless, the news did not come in time to be included in the press release issued by the Minister of Defence about the City parade on Friday 21 June—it made no reference to the Territorial Army, and that caused a good deal of annoyance among reservists. They felt upset enough as it was because they had not been called in greater numbers to serve in the Gulf.

S-type engagements involve people who volunteer to serve with the regular forces on the basis of their Territorial training. There is a rule that a bounty cannot be claimed by a Territorial soldier if he is not available for nine months of the bounty year. That has been waived for those who volunteered to serve in the Gulf, but not for those who volunteer to serve in Northern Ireland. Many people feel that there is just as much danger in Northern

[Mr. Neil Thorne]

Ireland as there was in the Gulf and it is wrong that those who volunteer for S-type engagements are precluded from getting bounties even if they have served for longer than three months, although for fewer than nine, in any one bounty year. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take an urgent look at that, because it is causing a great deal of discontent.

The availability of reservists depends on the help and assistance of employers, who play a vital role. I was delighted to hear recently that the employers are now considered to be more important than honorary colonels and that they are being invited more frequently to witness TA soldiers in camp and elsewhere so that they can see the beneficial effects. This has come about because it has been realised that it is essential to have employers on our side. I hope that when those in industry are considered for high civil honours, their support of the Territorial Army is taken into account. I know that the TA, with the assistance of the Ministry of Defence, sends certificates to employers to thank them for their support, but there must be a commitment to serving the country.

The TA can be compared with the National Guard, of which the United States made great use in the Gulf. More than 63,000 National Guard members served in the Gulf; a further 8,000 National Guards went to Europe to release personnel to serve in the Gulf; and another 60,000 were mobilised in the United States, ready to be sent to the Gulf if required. That shows the commitment of the United States to its reserve forces. Had we been able to provide similar opportunities for our reserve forces, they would have appreciated much more that they are an essential and integral part of the Army.

We need a complete reserve formation, and TA brigades are required. The system whereby TA soldiers are attached to other units is not working. Such soldiers were not called up to the Gulf, and the system has not proved satisfactory. Much discontent was caused thereby. Perhaps we should ask not only for a specific TA brigade but for TA officers serving in a high level in the echelons of the armed forces.

A rapid reaction force is being created and, recently, the TA has been training for certain action that would be useful in this regard. In particular, I think of the third line logistic support—transport, medical, supply and rear area defence, which are all aspects to which the Territorial Army could make a positive contribution. There has been much talk, and advertisements on hoardings, about the "One Army" concept and the importance of getting over the fact that the Territorial soldier is every bit as important as the regular. We have not heard much of that recently. I am disappointed, because if that had been implemented, the Territorial Army would have made a greater contribution in the Gulf.

I think here in particular of the paras, who have already been mentioned. They are extremely well recruited and deserve to be encouraged and expanded rather than cut. They can make a positive contribution towards the general reserve, and also, by helping the civil powers, to national disasters. We should give them a specific role in that, as the National Guard has in the United States.

If that is to be the case, we have to ensure that the Territorial Army has adequate training time, adequate permanent staff, the best equipment, adequate access to training areas, enough ammunition and plenty of administrative support. It should also have an additional factor that is essential in any TA unit—the best club in town. We have to say thank you to the wives and families of the TA soldiers, as well as the employers, and without the best club in town, these people cannot be thanked either.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister would not expect me to sit down without mentioning the fact that this year is the 175th year of continuing service of the Gurkhas with the Crown. Some 500,000 of them served in the 1939-45 war, of whom 52,000 were killed or wounded. They won 13 Victoria Crosses and 13 officers attached to them also won VCs. There are now 8,000 Gurkha soldiers and in May 1989 an undertaking was given that that number would not be reduced below 4,000, come what may. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to confirm that.

The use of Gurkha soldiers makes a positive contribution to third world aid. Their salaries, which are repatriated to Nepal, and the pensions that they receive on their return are a major source of income for the country. It would be entirely wrong if we did not ensure that this was properly acknowledged. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give some answers later.

8.6 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I did not intervene in the speech of the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), but he may be interested to know that there is a Territorial Army infantry brigade, based at York. I took some of my hon. Friends to see it on a 14-day exercise and they were impressed by the performance of the soldiers. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman wants an infantry brigade in the south, he will have to fight jolly hard for one.

The thought crossed my mind that the Minister passed to the colonels the problem of the amalgamation of the regiments and that they came back and said that they did not want to do it. If anybody else in the Army had done that, they would have been court martialled. It is time that Ministers got themselves into a courageous mood and started to make some decisions. A lot of argument tonight has been about what I would call a dereliction of duty —failure to come up with a decision. Perhaps Ministers have read what happened in 1968—some of us can actually remember what happened. The Secretary of State for Defence then was a Labour Member who represented a Leeds constituency. He conducted the whole business on a semi-secret basis and came up with the hotch-potch with which we are living today.

One famous north country regiment survived because the colonel-in-chief happened to be the King of Norway. Another survived because it was the Duke of Wellington's regiment. Logic went out the window when nepotism came through the back door. Some of us suspect that that might happen again and some hon. Members have implied that it is already happening.

I do not want to be boring, but I, too, want to refer to the problems of the Parachute Regiment. Hon. Members have referred to the criteria upon which that regiment is based. I believe that the 4th Volunteer Battalion of the Parachute Regiment has a record equal to none on recruitment as it is over-strength. I support that parachute battalion as it originated from the 9th Durham Light

Infantry Battalion. The battalion headquarters are in Pudsey and it recruits from Leeds and Bradford. It has outlying companies in Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Liverpool, Oldham, Lincoln and Leicester. What better dedication could one get than that of those volunteers who travel such distances to link together to form an effective battalion? Above all, they display all the attributes that one would expect from soldiers of the Parachute Regiment. I sincerely hope that the issue of the numbers expected to keep a battalion up to strength will be given full consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) mentioned the battle of the Somme. In those days an infantry battalion had 1,000 men. In the second world war an infantry battalion was made up of 800 men. Now, an up-to-strength infantry battalion is made up of 650 men. However, that battalion has 10 times the fire power of its predecessor in the second world war.

History shows that the British people, as Rudyard Kipling aptly said, do not want to know about the Army until the trouble starts. We tend to forget totally about the Army. In the 1930s our armed forces were depleted to the point of total weakness. The British expeditionary force that went to France in 1940 was probably just as ill-equipped as the British expeditionary force that went to France in 1914. It did not have the equipment to mount an effective defence and if it had not been for the morale of Dunkirk and elsewhere the losses would have been greater and many more would have been taken prisoner. We never learned the lesson from that.

When the conflict started in Korea we sent our troops out with tropical equipment. It never dawned on the silly farts to check the temperature in that part of the world. British troops were fighting in atrocious, bitter conditions and had it not been for the generosity of the Americans who were so well-equipped we would have had severe casualties. They would have been caused not by being shot at by the enemy, but by succumbing to the weather conditions.

What about the confrontation in Malaysia? Again, we were ill-equipped and had it not been for the incompetence of the communist insurgents in some areas we could have been faced with a long conflict. Some of us can remember Aden. An ill-led attack—if that is the right word—was made in a part of that colony that was then ours. That resulted in the men being sent in with a bad communications system as the signalling equipment was out of date. The weapons given to those men were not their own; they had been left somewhere else. As a result of bad leadership many were killed, including many from the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers.

Hon. Members have already spoken about what happened to our armour when it eventually got to the Gulf. We were damn lucky it was a short campaign, because otherwise our troops would have been stranded there without the necessary spares and equipment. Had it not been for the heroic efforts of the Vickers' workers of Leeds and Newcastle, who worked round the clock to get those spares out to the Challenger tanks, the position would have been far more serious.

I have always been a traditional supporter of the British regimental system because, under that system, it does not matter what one's rank is in the Army. If one is part of the regimental system one can safely say that, when in difficulties, one will be looked after by one's comrades. If the worst comes to the worst and a man is wounded and has financial difficulties as a result, every effort will be made—even if the state cannot provide support—by that man's regimental comrades to give him some financial assistance to help him and his nearest and dearest through that difficult time. I was pleased to note today that the Minister and the Government have had a change of thinking and have accepted that there is a greater obligation to help those who have the misfortune to be wounded either in peace or in war. They will be confronted with fewer financial worries than other men who have served in British forces over the centuries.

8.16 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) who clearly feels so strongly about the British Army and all it stands for.

A year has passed since we debated the defence estimates. For obvious reasons the emphasis then was on the momentous changes in eastern Europe and their implications for that region and further afield. On that occasion I suggested tentatively that one day NATO forces might have to be deployed to combat instability in the Balkans or the Baltic states. Little did I imagine that, in a matter of months, British troops would be sent to confront a dictator who had occupied a country "east of Suez", to coin a historic phrase.

Today I want to examine some of the implications of restructuring the British Army—an exercise made all the more sensitive for my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces as it is taking place in the aftermath of such a brilliantly successful campaign. First, however, I should like to pay a heart-felt tribute to all of those honoured in the Gulf awards announced last week. Those awards are a recognition of the sterling work done by all ranks within the Kuwait theatre of operations. I hope that the House will forgive me if, as a result of my particular experience, I single out Brigadier Cordingley and the 7th Armoured Brigade with whom I had the privilege of serving when they thrust forward 120 miles in 65 hours from Saudi Arabia, through Iraq, to Kuwait. Their commitment, cohesion, competence and compassion were something extremely special, even by the Army's high standards.

I believe that there is immense relief in all parts of the Chamber at the retention of the regimental system. It still staggers me that there were people who were prepared to argue that we could have infantry battalions numbered 1 to 35 or armoured regiments numbered 1 to 12 or whatever. They still expected that we could preserve the sort of loyalty for which our Army is renowned around the world. Our regimental system has caused jealousy in armed forces everywhere. However, I do not envy my right hon. Friend some of the delicate decisions that he must consider in the next few weeks. He has already said that he will take into account some of the geographical and historical factors behind the regiments. I welcome his assurances today that levels of recruitment, notwithstanding the cap on recruitment in recent months, will also be one of the factors taken into account when reaching any decision.

If regiments must be disbanded I hope that their identities will be preserved in the Territorial Army and the

[Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes]

reserve forces, whose role in the future will, I hope, be expanded and better defined, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne).

If my right hon. Friend takes such factors into account I believe that he will be rewarded by the regiments showing the very adaptability and flexibility that he wants. The regiments will put all their armchair critics to flight whatever challenges lie ahead.

On the wider issue of the new shape of the Army, I shall express some reservations that I trust will be interpreted in the constructive way in which they are offered. I can understand the political technique of saying to the Army, "We plan to reduce strength by 25 per cent. to 116,000 men. Now you tell us how to structure the armour, infantry, artillery and logistic units to fulfil our various roles." It might be useful to put numbers in context and to say that a reduction of 40,000 men represents about the total number of our service men in all three services who were involved in the Gulf.

What I do not understand is how and when the Army, if it so believes, says, "With the numbers with which we are left, we are not able to fulfil the roles that you have defined." It is not for me to say to the Army that I hope that it will not be unduly inhibited in saying that. The issue is clearly too important to take that approach.

It has been widely reported that we are faced by a Treasury-led exercise. I believe that the current euphemism is "close Treasury scrutiny". When does "close Treasury scrutiny" become overbearing or a damned sight too cosy by half? Does an Army of 116,000 men mean, when taking account of training establishments, a field Army of under 100,000? If so, is that compatible with home defence, NATO and out-of-area commitments? My mathematics may be at fault, and certainly they are no better than those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), but if the Royal Armoured Corps is to have a 50 per cent. reduction in manpower and infantry battalions are to be reduced in number by 40 per cent., does that imply in the context of an overall reduction of 25 per cent. that teeth arms are treated more harshly than support arms? I would welcome education and assurance from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I believe that he used the word "commensurate" in his earlier remarks, but I would be grateful for further details.

The House knows that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is trying to achieve a smaller and better Army that is better at home and better at work. If that is achieved, retention levels should be improved and many of the old bugbears of service in the Army will be removed. Those difficulties are not confined to pay because the Government have done marvellously well in increasing the pay of our armed forces. A more important factor is boredom, for example, which often arises from lack of opportunity to train, restrictions on track mileage and on the use of ammunition, as well as restrictions that are imposed on the use of spares.

If improvements are to be made in all those areas as well as in domestic conditions—involving separation within families, inadequate accommodation and general turbulence—money will be needed. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to ensure that the new model Army has proper financial support from the outset.

The current underprovision was revealed somewhat starkly by the British Army of the Rhine's deployment of a mere two brigades in the Gulf. That underprovision must not be built into the Army's new future. Unless funding is sorted out we shall not be able to afford the kit that served us so well in the Gulf. I shall not go into details now as time does not permit.

I make two positive suggestions in the belief that the service dividend comes before the peace dividend. First, I am told that the Ministry of Defence telephone directory is remarkable in size per se, and in its apparent justification of the internal structures of what many perceive to be a top-heavy organisation. I feel sure that the average senior non-commissioned officer or major who is made redundant as a result of "Options for Change" will be less disgruntled if he sees actual evidence of the slimming down of the MOD. We hear that there are about 20,000 people vulnerable in the MOD, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister whether that number is "adequate" in the broader-brush scene.

Secondly, there is the old issue of the hypothecation of funds, which I ask to be readdressed. It is a ghastly term but we all know what it means. In the context of options, it would be reasonable and equitable for the Army to benefit from the sale of superflous assests. The MOD sits on vast realty. Government Departments and nationalised bodies have not been noted over the past years for being very good at the management of property portfolios, even in the change of climate since 1979. With the vast capital receipts that could be realised, combined with the slashing of maintenance costs of many installations, I suggest that there could be a reciprocal gesture from the Treasury. Surely that is not too much to ask. That would mean that most of the proceeds could be reapplied for our practical and necessary defence needs. The importance of my argument is emphasised by rumours that a significant amount of the funds contributed by sympathetic countries during the Gulf war are languishing in the Treasury.

It could be argued that the Falklands conflict postponed the radical rethink of the Army, a process that other institutions have rightly had to face in the past decade. The Army is not shy of such an exercise; it simply wishes to be reassured that it will have the proper funding and structure to enable it to carry out the tasks that it undertakes supremely well. After all, it is no coincidence that the United Kingdom has been given the incomparable privilege of permanent leadership of the rapid reaction corps.

In the reorganisation of the Army, I ask my right hon. Friend to look to the lessons of the past and to show flexibility in dealing with the problems that may arise over numbers. I believe that the competence and consistency of this Conservative Government offer the best reassurance to the country that its defences will not be undermined in future.

8.26 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I am concerned about several aspects of "Options for Change", but, as I need to make a case, I shall confine my remarks to the provision that is made in the Colchester establishment for corrective training for service men and service women who are under sentence. The hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) has told me that he wishes to be associated with my remarks.

It is not possible properly to discuss Colchester's circumstances without making reference to the Royal Navy detention quarters at Portsmouth. I am uniquely placed in at least one respect to comment on both establishments, because I served simultaneously as a member of the boards of visitors of both establishments. In the past, I have made representations on behalf of the RNDQ that provision for corrective training with a nautical bias be retained at Portsmouth under direct Admiralty management and control. Until the special report of the Select Committee on Defence that considered the Armed Forces Bill during 1990-91, that case had always been made successfully. With the introduction of that report, however, it seems that the Ministry of Defence is to announce a timetable for the closure of RNDQs and a redeployment of resources at Colchester by October 1991. The discussion of potential consequences of such a redeployment is the purpose of my contribution to the debate.

The corrective training centre at Colchester was opened in its present form in 1988, though it was well known before that for its rigid discipline and effective application of what became known as the short, sharp shock. Whether it deserved such an epithet in those days is beyond my judgment because I had no direct experience of the regime. I must say, however, that all the service men whom I encountered who had sampled its discipline displayed a marked reluctance to return for a second helping.

I can vouch for the fact that the rebuilt establishment provides a well-balanced, comprehensive, rigorous and effectively demanding programme of rehabilitation for the A-category service men under sentence who intend to return to their units and for those in D-category who are destined for discharge.

The Colchester establishment—the military corrective training centre—was designed to accommodate slightly more than 200 males. Over a year ago, when proposals were first mooted to accommodate female offenders, I wrote to the Secretary of State urging that if the proposals were to be pursued, proper, permanent and purpose-built facilities should be provided for them, including the additional staff that would be required to supervise detention and rehabilitation. I believe that I wrote that recourse to temporary accommodation would be financially wasteful in the long term, and that conversion of existing space would have adverse effects on current detention programmes and would be nonsensical following so quickly on the official opening of such a carefully conceived and purpose-built centre.

Sad to say, the wrong decision was made last year, so the MCTC has been deprived of about two dozen places for men while it currently accommodates only five women in the space that has been reallocated. As a result of that error of judgment, there is now a waiting list of service men under sentence. These men are wrongly detained in regimental guardrooms while they await transfer and induction to Colchester. Over the past fortnight, there have been between four and 15 men in that position. The situation is unacceptable and is to be deplored.

Without betraying confidences, I shall let the House know how the members of staff who are responsible for the MCTC feel about the present circumstances. They say that the

"MCTC is being asked to provide an instant short term solution to make up for their reluctance to tackle the issue earlier . . . These issues are contrary to the fundamental principles of corrective training and ethos of the Centre which have evolved through experience and errors made in the past over many years. To set them aside because of demand without making adequate additional provision is a dangerous and unprofessional precedent to set and one which should not be taken lightly. As you are aware the MCTC can be likened to a delicate eco-system which is highly susceptible to change and inappropriate tinkering. The Imprisonment and Detention Rules are our safeguard and should be honoured in full . . . We believe we have tinkered with the Regime enough and that accommodating the RN with a 'quickie ad hoc' solution is not the answer. We believe we have a 'golden' opportunity to fund the build of the new F Section on the basis that its completion will release sufficient accommodation to meet the RN's requirements on the closure of RNDQs. Not only is this the most practical solution but the financial savings are both obvious and considerable and would more than offset the cost of the new build in less than 2 years. We would have thought that even the Treasury would support such a decision."

Those are the thoughts of the staff; that is their well-considered response. We pay those people to look after those responsibilities on our behalf.

Let no one suggest today that proposals under "Options for Change" will reduce demand for places in corrective training. That cannot be so, and I shall explain why. Guardroom personnel in numerous units have been or are being civilianised. The number of operational guardrooms has already been reduced in the Army, and in the Royal Air Force the regional service detention rooms have been reduced from five to four. Many units of all three services will be returning to serve within the bounds of the United Kingdom. It is natural to assume that the charge of absent without leave will become more frequent as it is infinitely easier to go absent close to home than while stationed overseas. I remind the House that absenteeism accounts for about two thirds of charges.

I wish to make three more points. First, it would be wrong for RNDQs to be moved before proper provision is made. I ask the Minister to announce tonight that October 1991 is not a possibility. Secondly, the Royal Navy and the RAF should be making a financial contribution to the cost of Colchester. My understanding is that they do not. Why not? They should do; perhaps they could buy the place. Thirdly, all existing accommodation needs to be made secure. That was known 12 months ago, when prisoners escaped from Colchester simply by knocking holes in the ceiling, getting into the roof space, kicking off the tiles, dropping to the ground, and legging it into the distance. That is still possible today, but nothing has been done about it. Why not?

I appeal to the Minister to pay serious attention to the points that I have raised, because they are of pressing urgency. I would have loved to be able to comment on some of the "Mad Mitch" aspects of our earlier discussions, and I would have loved to be able to talk about the future of the armed forces. In my North Atlantic Assembly role, I serve on the committee that has been examining those circumstances since 1988. Sadly, I must confine myself to the remarks that I have made.

8.33 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): As we have witnessed the collapse of the Warsaw pact, the withdrawal of more Soviet troops to inside their borders, and the reluctance of President Gorbachev to support every communist dictatorship in the world, it is right to review our defence requirements and to plan a new role for NATO.

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

For the past 40 years, our defence plan has envisaged a mass attack on West Germany by the Soviet, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Hungarian and crack East German divisions. That can no longer happen. We must respond to that change, and we need to develop new armoured divisions that can react immediately and flexibly to any new threat. The world is still a very dangerous place, as we recently discovered, and too much talk about a peace dividend can be sadly misplaced.

I must make it clear what the peace dividend actually means: we keep our defences strong, and peace is our dividend. The phenomenal changes in Europe have been possible because the west has maintained strong defences —and the Conservative party and Government can take a special pride in the fact that Britain has done more than any other nation in Europe to guard the peace over the past 40 years, as witnessed by our immediate and brilliant response to aggression in the Gulf.

The north-west of England has done its fair share in keeping the peace. I am proud to represent the county town of Lancashire. However, the King's Own Royal Border Regiment covers not only Lancashire but Cumbria, so today I am not pleading only a localised constituency case. Over the years, the north-west has consistently produced high-grade soldiers. It continues to produce, on a per capita basis, more recruits for the Army than any other region in the United Kingdom. Of crucial importance is the fact that the census projections show that the north-west will continue to have more than sufficient recruits in the future—even better than the eastern side of the Pennines.

We all accept that there will have to be reductions in the Army, painful though that is. Those of us who believe in the regimental system—of whom I am very much one—must prove that the system is sufficiently flexible to respond to change—but the response must be fair and be seen to be fair. When the subject of amalgamations is discussed, I trust that the Government and the Ministry of Defence will need no reminding that all the infantry regiments in the north-west were amalgamated in the 1959 round of defence reductions. In total, seven former regiments in the north-west were reduced to the current three. It would be a great travesty of justice if any of those fine regiments was required to suffer amalgamation yet again—or, even worse, be threatened with disbandment —while regiments elsewhere escaped amalgamation in any form. It would be doubly unjust if any unamalgamated regiment hailed from any area whose future recruiting potential was less optimistic than that prevailing in the north-west.

The MOD requires the King's division to reduce from eight regular infantry battalions to six. The Royal Irish is giving up one. The question is whether the second battalion should come from east or west of the Pennines.

The criteria of the executive committee of the Army Board are clear. Top priority is manning, to ensure that battalions are fully manned in future. The crucial matter is future manning potential—a point made also by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger). The total number of young men in the target area for the KORBR is better than that in the east of the Pennines. Based on the national census for the 16 to 24-year-old age group, at each five-year point the west will have more young men than the east from which to select the numbers that they need. There would be a wider choice from which to recruit the projected 115 men needed per battalion per year to maintain operational levels—and wider choice means better quality.

The next criterion is that, in principle, those regiments that have not been amalgamated until now should be considered for amalgamation before others that have been amalgamated. The west has an unanswerable case. Not only have all the regiments to the west of the Pennines previously been amalgamated, in 1959, but two to the east have never been amalgamated. It would be wrong to inflict further amalgamation on the west while two in the east remained unamalgamated.

Another criterion is geographical representation. If the KORBR goes, Cumbrians will have no county regiment in which to enlist, which would be contrary to the ECAB criteria.

The final criterion is territorial links with the Territorial Army. West of the Pennines, each of the three regiments has one regular and one Territorial Army battalion. The east has only a regular battalion. The Yorkshire Territorial Army elected to be separate, so it has no kindred identity with the regulars. Moreover, the strength of the Territorial Army in Lancashire was acknowledged two years ago by the provision of a superb new headquarters in Lancaster —the finest in the United Kingdom.

I sympathise with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the delicacy and the sensitivity of the decisions that Defence Ministers and their senior military advisers must take. That is why my right hon. Friend and the Army are to be commended for producing impartial guidelines and criteria for determining which regiments are to be disbanded or amalgamated. I and those of my hon. Friends who represent other constituencies in the north-west studied the guidelines and decided that they were the best possible criteria for the Minister of Defence to use in reducing regimental strength fairly—without any individual regiment using undue influence. As the three regiments west of the Pennines have already been amalgamated and show the best recruiting potential, no changes to them should be made—if the Army's own guidelines are to be followed.

I am not making a special case for the King's Own Royal Border Regiment or the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, or asking for the Army's rules to be bent. Nor do I expect my right hon. Friend to make any announcement tonight. However, I make one demand of his winding-up speech; that he assures the House that the official guidelines produced by the executive committee of the Army Board will be followed in the King's division in the north of England.

If my right hon. Friend does not give me that assurance, there will be grave suspicion that some generals are bending the rules to favour the eastern side of the Pennines and some unamalgamated regiments there—and then the fat will really be in the fire. However, if my right hon. Friend assures me that the Army will follow its own rules, I am delighted to tell him that the young men of north-west England will continue to serve Queen and country as proud members of their county regiments, just as they have always done.

8.40 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I have been listening almost as a bystander in the debate between Government Back-Benchers and Ministers. It has been almost a case of the poll tax revisited. The Government will have a lot of trouble on their hands dealing with the legitimate aspirations of the supporters of county regiments. I wonder whether it is right to concede the argument automatically that Army numbers should be reduced, and therefore to fight over the bones that are left—"My regiment before that of anyone else."

One of the strongest cases made so far was that advanced by the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) who argued conclusively that we will not be able to discharge our military obligations in wartime if the Army is reduced to the level proposed by the Government. I may add that we will be unable to discharge our peacetime obligations with the numbers that the Government envisage. That is the crux of the matter.

One is usually embarrassed about repeating cliches, but that used by the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) deserves to be repeated time and time again. I refer to her remark that the peace dividend is peace itself. Since 1970, whatever Government have been in office, defence expenditure has fallen, by a total of 19·2 per cent., and manpower by 33·4 per cent. One may concede that in 1970 we were overdefended or overcommitted, but one wonders how far one can go before reaching bottom.

Unless the Government are prepared to abandon Britain's commitments, which would be difficult, the Army and the armed forces of the future will be so overstretched that they will be a paper Army, Navy and Air Force. Last July, I asked the Secretary of State how, if the Royal Navy could not discharge its obligations with a force of "about 50 frigates and destroyers, it would do so with about 40" —and we know that the figure will really be 34 or 35. The same applies in respect of the Army.

Over the years, we have made the decision to have one of the smallest armies in NATO. A United States report on allied contributions to common defence published in May 1991 shows that, in terms of active duty, military and civilian manpower, and committed reserves in NATO and Japan, as a percentage of total population, Britain comes twelfth. It is clear to me, as it must be to anyone, that our armed forces, having been at a high level in 1970, have fallen to a level below which it will be difficult to sustain Britain's future military defence.

The threat today is not that which existed two or three years ago, for it has moved much farther east. While I am delighted by the actions of President Gorbachev, I refer the House to a paper by a Soviet general who has not been made redundant by today's abandonment of the Warsaw pact—General Lobov, a senior member of his country's General Staff. He reported that the Soviet military was being disadvantaged by the conventional forces in Europe treaty and suggested several solutions—and I am sure that he was writing not as an isolated member of the Soviet General Staff but on its behalf.

General Lobov's prescription is to improve combat training; effect the transition to a contract system—that is, professionalisation—for manning; maintain headquarters and war time strength in peace time; search for new forms of co-operation on defence issues with the armies of former allies; and improve mobilisation capacity under the new economic conditions.

General Lobov also calls for a rapid reaction force based east of the Urals—that is, outside the CFE treaty area. He cites the United States' rapid deployment force, numbering 444,000, as an example. He also argues for a blue water navy capable of interdicting allied reinforcement. I know General Lobov very well—he does not hide his views—and I suggest that we need to be a little cautious about developments in the Soviet Union.

Perhaps a few years from now, the situation will be beyond doubt. President Gorbachev may have control over the military, and the CFE, START 1, and START 2 treaties, and others, may have been implemented. If so, we will be able to perceive with certainty that our forces need not be kept at their present level—or even at that now envisaged by the Government. However, I suggest that that time has not yet come. When it does, I will acknowledge it—and hope that everyone else will.

It is a pleasure to speak in any defence debate, and particularly so now, because my views roughly correspond with those of my party. Having listened to the robust speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), and in anticipating the future, I speak with a great deal of pleasure about what has been happening. I listened with pleasure, too, when right hon. and hon. Members strongly defended our armed forces —unlike in many previous debates in the House. It is ironic that the Minister of State's criticism of Labour's nuclear policy is that we are considering cancelling Trident SSBN 08. At one time, we were criticised for our intention to cancel SSBN 05, 06, and 07.

It is legitimate to argue, bearing in mind strategic arms reductions, that three submarines will be feasible. I fully acknowledge that four may be desirable, in case a disaster befalls one of them. However, it may be that by the time the flotilla is at sea, there will be greater co-operation with our French allies, and that the need for many submarines from European nuclear powers to be at sea simultaneously will prove unnecessary. We heard this afternoon that the Navy is cancelling only one submarine, and we must be thankful that it is only one.

Although the threat has changed, it has not been eliminated, and the euphoric response that followed developments in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been put on ice. Some people fondly imagined—and still imagine—that armed forces have become superfluous. Some argue even now that our security requirements will be encompassed and satisfied by some new world order, the United Nations, the CSCE process, and, more implausibly, the European Community. However, we will not be able to meet our full security requirements unless we maintain a high commitment in the future, as we have in the past, to NATO.

That is not just because that commitment will prevent unilateralism—and I do not use that word in the old sense —or because, if there were any so-called EC alternative, to do otherwise might sever the link between Europe and North America—which would be a catastrophe in every sense of the word. It is because those who aspire to a European defence order now are being somewhat premature, by at least a decade.

The year 1991 has been seen as critical for NATO. How will NATO be able to agree and to implement a new political and military strategy in response to an environment in Europe characterised by both positive and negative phenomena? The way in which NATO has adapted, even before the London declaration, has been

[Mr. Bruce George]

quite incredible. It has shown relevance and that it is not prepared to wither away in empathy with the decline of the Warsaw pact NATO is relevant, easy to justify and is not merely wanted by most EC countries; its existence is earnestly desired by many of our former adversaries in eastern Europe, who certainly knew that its existence underpinned their security.

The second critical issue for 1991 will be whether the historic process—building down the east-west military confrontation—continues or whether there will be any major setbacks.

The third major area of concern in 1991 involves what lessons Europe will draw from its mixed experience during the Gulf crisis. In my humble view, that experience would not lead one to the conclusion that NATO will be supplanted by the EC.

8.50 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): I look back upon a regimental career which started in the East Surrey regiment and continued in the Royal Fusiliers, the 43rd —the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry —the King's African Rifles, and ended in the Parachute regiment. If I embarked upon special pleading tonight, I could go on for quite some time, but I would not include the King's African Rifles.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is absolutely right to set parameters for the reduction especially in the infantry and, to leave it to the professionals to decide, but then he has to make the final decision. I cannot understand why any hon. Member on either side of the House should object to that. The last thing that I want is to see politicians making the initial decisions. Let the professionals do it; that is what they are paid for, and for which they have the expert knowledge.

I take issue with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and other Ministers over the levels set, especially for the infantry. It is not merely the Queen's or Scottish divisions which are worried; every soldier I talk to believes that we are cutting our infantry far too hard and fast. I join with my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) in saying that 38 battalions would be much nearer the mark. The Minister would have given his professionals a much easier task if he had given that figure.

There is no doubt that the British infantry is of the finest quality in the world. It is part of our material for war, but such quality cannot be achieved overnight. It can be achieved with machines. One can stop a tank production line, press a button and start the line producing again. However, once one loses quality manpower one is left high and dry because it will take at least a year to begin retraining, and I doubt whether one could do so even then.

The quality of our infantry and the special quality of our airborne soldiers has been recognised and respected world wide. Without that quality, the Falklands campaign would have failed. There would have been no Goose Green and no Darwin. Without that quality, we could not have played such a magnificent part in the Iraqi campaign. The Royal Fusiliers were there in strength and played their part very well indeed. Without that quality, we certainly would not have been allocated the prime task that we have been given within the rapid reaction force. Every hon. Member can be proud of that role.

My message is that the cuts are too deep and are in the wrong place. That case was argued very well by John Keegan in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* today which many hon. Members may have seen. He says that an infantry battalion costs about £15 million a year, in round figures. I hope that the review of the other arms of the service bears that figure in mind. In the article, he mentions that the intelligence corps has 1,600 soldiers and exists

"to interrogate enemy prisoners and to exercise 'field security' in time of European war."

Let us have a good hard look at that. A hard look, too, at the education corps—never my favourite—might provide us with another battalion. The chaplains' department must cost another £15 million: and then there are 200 dentists and 700 doctors—one to every 220 soldiers in the Army. That is where the cuts must be made first and foremost. Leave our infantry battalions alone where that is possible and let them remain at full strength. The infantry must hold pride of place in the Army of the future and I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) in his place because I know that he will support me in that argument.

If there are to be reductions they must never be on the basis of shared misery. That is no way to retain the quality of which we are so proud. Quality is the key, and we must ensure that it is kept both within a reduced regular infantry strength and within the Territorial Army which will still have a vital role to play.

Many hon. Members have been kind tonight to mention the territorial battalions of airborne forces—for example, the fourth battalion of the Parachute Regiment, which is a TA battalion. I must also mention the 15th battalion in Scotland, another magnificent battalion. Not one of the soldiers who are so happy to be recruited into the 15th battalion would look at any other TA battalion. They want to be airborne soldiers and we can say goodbye to them if we do not keep them as airborne soldiers. Then all that quality will disappear.

When considering quality and our regular Army, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham said, there cannot be any cut in the strength of the Parachute Regiment, the brigade headquarters and its supporting arms within fifth Airborne Brigade.

I also worry about the provisions of the right sort of training for a specialist force such as the Parachute Regiment. In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said that they would move junior regiments from Aldershot and that there would be amalgamation. One cannot amalgamate junior soldiers in the Parachute Regiment or parachute soldiers in training with ordinary infantry. I am not being unkind to the infantry, but that would be a desperate waste of money because they would start at one level of training and then move to a much higher standard.

Proper provision for the right sort of training for airborne soldiers is crucial. I will not say that the Parachute Regiment and the Royal Marines are the key to the future of our ground forces, but they both have a crucial role. In general, I am a great supporter of the Royal Marines. We need an undertaking, however, that there will be no difference between the training given to the Royal Marines and that provided for airborne forces. We must also look carefully at the establishment levels of the Royal Marines, which are enormous in comparison with that of our Airborne Brigade.

Everyone has, of course, made it clear that special pleading is not the order of the day, but, if we are to maintain quality, that exemplary regiment, the Devon and Dorsets—with its fine recruiting record—must surely be retained. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister will agree. If anything happens to that regiment, there will be the devil to pay.

There is still time to think again. At the very least, we should consider retaining between 38 and 40 battalions rather than the 34 that are now envisaged. If cuts must be made, let them be made "at the back end". Let me finish on a lighthearted note: that might even leave room, at last, for a decent gymnasium in the Ministry of Defence.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. We have half an hour before the winding-up speeches are expected to begin. It will be evident that many hon. Members still wish to speak. I hope that speeches will continue to be short.

9 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Let me start with a few brief words about my constituency.

Woolwich has been a military town since Henry VIII set up his dockyard there in 1515. The Woolwich arsenal was established in 1671, and Woolwich has been the cradle of the Royal Artillery ever since, having maintained a close involvement with it since its formation in 1716.

Since the Royal Ordnance factory closed in 1967, the main employer on the Woolwich arsenal site has been the Directorate-General of Defence Quality Assurance, which was referred to earlier. Throughout the 1970s, the directorate was beset with uncertainty about the possible dispersal of its work away from London.

In the early 1980s, money, time and effort were invested in planning the reorganisation of the arsenal site: that included the investment of £300,000 in the design of a new quality assurance headquarters. On 12 April 1984, the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee), then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement, wrote to reassure me about the future of the arsenal. The letter said that

"in the foreseeable future"

a move

"would be very expensive. It, therefore, looks as if there will be a QA presence at Woolwich for a very long time."

Less than five years later, another Minister who had done a different set of sums decided that it made financial sense to move quality assurance from Woolwich to Teesside. Since then, that decision has been subjected to scrutiny; now no one seems to know where the directorate will end up. We are expecting people to do their work with uncertainty hanging over them year after year. It is about time that the MOD made a firm decision about where quality assurance will finally lay its weary head.

The people of Woolwich had, I think, come to terms with the loss of the arsenal from 1993 onwards; but, in the past few weeks, we have read stories in the press about the transfer of the Royal Artillery from Woolwich to Larkhill. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces assures me that no decisions have been made; I note, however, that if the RA left Woolwich, that would mark the end of nearly 500 years of service to the armed forces on the part of the local people.

I am not indulging in a special pleading. I accept that we cannot live in the past; I realise that our armed forces must be organised in a cost-effective way. But, as the forces become smaller, many communities throughout the country will find that historic and military links are suddenly severed. I hope that the Government will recognise the resulting problems, and will handle them with sympathy and sensitivity.

The Select Committee reported on the multiple-launch rocket system in March, and the Government replied in May. MLRS was deployed to great effect in the Gulf: we all saw pictures on television showing its awesome fire power as the salvoes of rockets were launched. Later, we heard of the shattering effect of those rockets on the morale of the Iraqi troops as each delivered 644 anti-personnel bomblets on the target.

We should recognise that the Army was lucky that MLRS was available in time. The decision—made in 1985—that it should be built on a collaborative basis in Europe, rather than being purchased from the United States, led to a four-year deferment of the in-service date. Our report recognised—and the Government's reply emphasised these factors—that European production would bring some £300 million worth of work to United Kingdom companies, and would introduce a second source of supply. As our report observed, however,

"These benefits have to be weighed against the disadvantage of the four-year delay in the in-service date."

Without MLRS, the effectiveness of the British Army in the Gulf would have been much reduced.

Three versions of MLRS are in production or under development. When the Select Committee reported, the MOD was uncertain about its requirement for all of them. I am glad that the Government have decided that they require sufficient MLRS1 launchers and ammunition to supply three regiments, as envisaged in the earlier plans. We said in our report that the completion of the review of our requirement for MLRS2 rockets was urgent. I therefore welcome the Minister's announcement this afternoon.

MLRS3, the anti-tank munition, is at an earlier stage of development. It is progressing well and we are pleased that the MOD has learnt several lessons from the first two versions. The greatest threat so far has been doubt about the United States' commitment to the project. The Defence Select Committee wrote in April to the chairman of the Senate's appropriation sub-committee and the Senate subsequently approved the funds. Its chairman assured us that our letter had been a crucial factor in reaching that decision. I am sure that he wrote the same to everybody else who approached him.

The Phoenix remotely piloted vehicle is intended to assist the location of targets for MLRS and other artillery. Phoenix has been severely delayed for 32 months by development problems, which, thankfully, have been overcome. The difference is that MLRS just made it to the Gulf but Phoenix did not. That was an enormous pity because Phoenix would have been of much assistance to our artillery. We look forward to introduction into service soon.

Our report on the attack helicopter, which has been published today, recognises that the MOD is right to abandon its attempt to combine the attack helicopter and the armed reconnaissance helicopter roles. The collaborative land attack helicopter project, which cost the MOD no more than £3·5 million, proved that that involved too

[Mr. John Cartwright]

many compromises. The MOD is rightly concentrating on preparing the staff requirement for the attack helicopter, which will be purchased off the shelf from abroad. The Defence Select Committee has always doubted whether the United Kingdom's requirement needed to be met by a new development programme.

Today's report also covers the third-generation anti-tank guided weapons systems that are being developed collaboratively, mainly with Germany and France. We are concerned about the length of time that is being taken to develop those systems. The medium-range, man-portable version is taking eight years, while the helicopter vehicle-mounted, long-range version is a 10-year programme. The Committee concludes:

"The TRIGAT weapons systems are undoubtedly technically quite advanced, but we doubt whether the complexity of the task justifies such lengthy periods of development."

We are concerned that the MOD has yet to decide which attack helicopter or land vehicle it will procure. These decisions are important to TRIGAT's development progress and must not be delayed much longer. The choice of an attack helicopter and its principal anti-armour weapon will be crucial for the Army's strength in the decade ahead.

Faced with dramatic changes in Europe and the need to scale down the size of Britain's forces, the Government could have decided to abandon some military capability and to opt for a policy of role specialisation with our European allies. That would have meant depending on our allies to perform tasks that the British forces had previously done for themselves. The Government have chosen to maintain existing British military capability, but at a lower level. On balance, I think that that decision is probably correct. Having argued for role specialisation in the past, I must now recognise that the scope for such change is limited. The Gulf war showed us clearly that the interests of European nations are not identical and that not all our allies can be relied on in the complex crises that have replaced the clarity of the former east-west conflict.

The cost of maintaining a wide range of diverse military capabilities will be substantial. Smaller forces, flexible enough to meet unpredictable challenges, must, as we all recognise, be well trained, well equipped and, above all, well motivated. That is not a cheap option. The worst of all worlds would be for British forces to find themselves smaller but still overstretched in an effort to cover too many roles and too many responsibilities. The new position offers us the chance to match, at long last, the resources of our armed forces to the tasks that we expect them to carry out. That, rather than a crude cost-cutting exercise, must be what we do in this operation.

9.9 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Today I brought my top hat into the Chamber, for three reasons. The first is that we are witnessing the funeral of the British infantry —and here I disagree with some hon. Members who have spoken on that issue. Secondly, this is largely being done by a massive conjuring trick. Of course, one could produce a live rabbit from a top hat, but not from one that has been squashed flat and has become so small that it does not have credibility. My third reason is the great injustice that has been done to the three mutilated Grenadiers and many other service men who have not been properly compensated. I propose to wear my top hat in the Chamber until there is justice for those soldiers.

The speech by my right hon. Friend the Minister was disappointing—I would have given it the title "Thanks for the Memory". But my right hon. Friends the Minister and the Secretary of State deserve sincere thanks for saving the regimental system, which was under question. They also deserve sincere praise for negotiating with our NATO allies our role in the rapid reaction corps. That was a very major achievement.

My right hon. Friend the Minister also deserves sympathy. I am about to criticise, but in the understanding that any reorganisation and any cuts involve difficulties. It is a darn tough job and this is a highly charged political issue.

First, cuts, like expansion, must be justified and, secondly, they must be sensibly made.

Mr. Gorbachev's peace challenge has changed the very nature of strategic peace itself from nuclear deterrence, under which we lived for 45 years—to a large extent under the nuclear wing of the United States eagle—to a peace of detente.

Although there have been great changes, I question whether there has been any significant lessening of the threat. Under the old threat, we knew its identity, probably the Warsaw pact; we knew its direction, from the east; and we knew the killing zone, in Europe. Now we do not know the identity, direction or potential killing zone. Who on 1 July last year would have expected the Gulf crisis? Today we look at the possibilities of a military backlash in the Soviet Union, of unrest in Europe and of mass immigration from eastern Europe to the EEC.

There are many lessons to be learned from the Gulf, a few of which I shall highlight. First, logistics are the essential oxygen of the modern high-intensity battlefield. Secondly, if one is not high-tech, one is dead. Third, it is difficult, if not impossible initially, to employ reserve forces in the front line teeth arms of a modern battlefield.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): They certainly were deployed in the Gulf war. What about the United States National Guard?

Mr. Browne: I am sorry, but I am rushing against the clock.

We were told that in future we would deploy small, lightly equipped units, but in the Gulf crisis we deployed large, heavily equipped formations. The gap between warning time and response time was vital—we were lucky to get some six months.

The most important lesson was that the United Kingdom formations in Germany were not battle ready. Three armoured divisions were denuded to provide just two armoured brigades which were battle ready. The ratio was 9:2 in terms of men, ammunition, equipment and spare parts. It exemplified the fact that, for decades, we were sold third-party insurance in terms of our military defence. Successive Governments cut and said that it would make no difference, but it has made a difference. If the Government really believe that peace alone is not enough and that we demand peace with freedom, and therefore that defence is their primary duty, they owe it to the country to deliver comprehensive defence insurance.

Today's Army is not battle ready and is overstretched, and yet it is proposed to cut it by another one third. I have

yet to hear what change in strategy, threat or task justifies that. The Chief Constable of Northern Ireland asked for another two battalions, but we cannot provide them. If we have a rapid reaction corps, we must have battle-ready divisions—we no longer want the type of divisions that sat undermanned and underequipped in Germany. Cuts must be constructive. They must be built up from the intended strategy and roles of the armed forces. They must concentrate on quality, cost-effectiveness and the best-suited assets. We now have a director of infantry who has called for equal pain, for pro rata, across-the-board cuts. I mean no disrespect to the Opposition but that is socialism—socialism in uniform. I have never heard of anything so fatuous or damaging to the armed forces.

If we are after quality, why do we consider cutting the Parachute Regiment, the Household division and the Gurkhas? If we are after suitability, why are we cutting five British battalions in order to retain the Gurkhas? Why are we cutting the large regiments, which we want, but saving the small ones? Pro rata cuts are utter nonsense and very damaging.

I turn to the Household division. A cut of three battalions is proposed for the Household division, but it has already lost two battalions in the previous cuts. It has a dual role—it has public duties and performs an active role, which is vital for recruitment for the whole division. Thirty per cent. of the Household division took part in the Gulf war. It is an extremely cost-effective division. First, it is made up of large regiments. Secondly, it earns money. Tourist income in Britain amounted to some £5·5 billion last year and, in view of the posters seen worldwide, what would be a fair estimate of the division's contribution to that sum—20 or 10 per cent? Even if one takes the lower figure, 10 per cent. represents £550 million that is earned by the Household division. Therefore, I believe that it is largely self-financing. The ceremonial uniforms for the entire division cost less than one tank.

As for quality, would it raise the quality of the British Army to cut three footguards battalions? Such a question is unbelievable. History proves it to be nonsense.

Why is a general—the poor chap whom I have criticised—the director of infantry—playing such a highly charged political role? I believe that, as many hon. Members have said, it is because my right hon. Friend and his colleagues have abdicated their responsibility for what is a very difficult political decision. In making that decision, my right hon. Friend must consider the concept of the critical mass—in this case, the critical mass of military credibility. I believe that the Army is already down to that critical mass and that the proposed cuts would go below it.

I turn now to the injured Grenadiers. Their story is well-known and I shall not waste time repeating it. The Government have decided not to make an ex gratia payment. They have challenged the three mutilated Grenadiers to take on the mighty Ministry of Defence, which has shrouded itself in secrecy. The Ministry of Defence still holds the crucial evidence on which the outcome will rely—the inquiry's report—and it is scandalous that it is still a classified document and not yet available to the Grenadiers' legal representatives.

It is interesting that the Government keep assuring the House that no one was to blame for the incident. How is it possible to know that no one was to blame for an unexploded shell lying for five years on a range over which people have walked and which has been dug? The board of inquiry was not asked even to investigate why the shell was there, so it did not report on negligence in that respect. I believe that justice will not be done until my right hon. Friend assures the House that the board of inquiry's report will be made available and that the inquiry itself will be reopened.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's proposed meetings with the Grenadiers' legal representatives, but they are not enough. We want either the ex gratia payment or the reopening of the board of inquiry. This would create a precedent, but why are the Government so worried about precedents? They are worried because there are tens of soldiers now in civilian life who have not received the correct compensation. They should have fair compensation, so of course we are striving to create a precedent because in this case it would be a good precedent.

I have already taken enough of the House's time, so I shall sit down.

9.19 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I realise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we are all expected to try to be brief, and I therefore propose to touch on only three issues—Ministry of Defence contracts, the alternative strategy and a matter relating to service men.

As an engineer, I readily welcome the contract placed for the Challenger 2 tank, which will greatly assist Newcastle and Leeds. The Challenger is a good tank—an efficient machine—and I also believe that we should buy British wherever possible. Having said that, I think that the Government should look to the future and realise that the contracts will last for only the next two or three years. We ought to consider our future strategy on how to provide work for defence workers in various parts of the country. We have often talked about the peace dividend, and we should remember that these are serious matters both for workers and for the nation as a whole. We cannot expect that the Ministry of Defence will be placing large orders for ever—the days of large contracts are gone—and, that being so, we should seriously consider our strategy for the peace dividend.

My second point concerns the serious question of what is happening to the industrial south. The House will recall that during the last recession most of the defence jobs lost were based in the north, but now job losses are occurring in the south. That is something new. Companies such as Westland and British Aerospace are entering a critical period and the consequence will be further massive job losses. Perhaps hon. Members representing southern constituencies are not used to mass unemployment, but there is every indication that job losses will now descend on the south. I draw attention in particular to the large British Aerospace factory in Kingston. I have a letter from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, which has made some proposals for a sky park to help to alleviate the massive 3,200 job loss which will affect not only that factory but businesses in the area, both large and small. The same is true of many other areas in the south.

I am the secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union parliamentary group. I get tired of the increasing frequency with which people from the southern counties appeal to us to make representations about their jobs. It would be a healthy thing if Conservative Members from

[Mr. Ken Eastham]

the southern counties started to take note of the growing problem, which will primarily affect the engineering industry.

My third point concerns service men and personnel. Numerous hon. Members have spoken with great pride about the quality, loyalty and efficiency of our service men, saying what great people they are. A constituent of mine, Mr. H. A. Pickering, joined the forces as a boy soldier at the age of 17. Until that time he had had no other employment. He then went into the senior force and was posted to Munster in West Germany. He had been there for only six or eight weeks and was on sentry duty when, at the age of 19, he was shot up by the IRA in a terrorist attack. His legs were seriously injured and he received 11 machine gun bullet wounds. He was given 25 pints of blood and ultimately was discharged from the Army with a 50 per cent. disability.

That case was drawn to my attention in March. I made some inquiries about how that young man was managing because he had no family to go to. Some friends of mine took him in without any assistance. That young boy was having a very difficult time. I made inquiries about his benefits and discovered that he was initially receiving £83 a month from the German Government, £24·14 minus tax from the Army and £114 per month from the Department of Social Security. According to my calculations, that young lad was receiving less than £53 a week on which to live. Since my inquiries with the Minister, the Army pension has been increased to £144 a month, although that will still be taxed as before. He also received a princely lump sum of £2,578.

That young lad is now 21. He would normally have expected to work for the next 40 years. I am extremely disappointed and dissatisfied about the treatment that he has received from the Government. I wrote to the MOD and received a letter from the Earl of Arran dated 20 June. He wrote:

"I am afraid that there is no appeal procedure against the rates of pension paid out under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme."

I thought about that lump sum of about £2,500 and the meagre monthly payment that that young man is receiving and I wondered what kind of a lump sum someone would expect to receive if he was involved in a serious motor accident. I also thought about what happens in the police force. Police work is hazardous. I made inquiries and was told that the police can receive two benefits—industrial injuries payments and criminal injuries compensation. However, that is not the case for the poor young lad who gave his best in the Army about which so many talk with pride. The Army offers very little compensation in such circumstances.

I get a little sick when I watch those great victory parades with people marching down the streets as bands play and flags fly. Although medals are given out, we never hear about the young fellows who have given their all, but have received virtually nothing in compensation.

I appeal to the Minister to review the appeal procedures for unfortunate people such as the young man whom I have described. Those people have given so much and are obviously receiving so little. It is about time that the MOD made changes through the Treasury so that those people can receive adequate compensation which would at least place them on the same footing as anyone else who suffers injury. This is a complete disgrace and the Minister has a lot to answer for.

9.29 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I was appalled by the behaviour of the Government Front-Bench Members when my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) outlined the case of his constituent who was badly wounded and received such sad, sorry and shabby treatment from Ministers.

The Secretary of State does not like this matter at all. He started off by muttering from a sedentary position when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was discomforted by criticisms that were made of him on television—criticisms that were echoed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Minister's discomfort reached appalling levels during the debate. If the television programme misrepresented his position—*[Interruption.]* Even if the press release misrepresented his position, I watched the television programme and heard the Minister say that they should get jobs in which they do not need to use their legs, or words to that effect. If I have misunderstood it, I am sure that many other people have also misunderstood it. If the Minister does not like it, he has recourse to the courts to settle it. He does not have to come here to justify his position and waste the time of the House by making what was basically a personal statement on the issue.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has highlighted the Government's position in the shabby sequence of events in which they participated. I am not at all surprised, because they reached the depths of shabbiness and contemptibility in their attack on the Labour party's position on the Gulf war. The Minister said that Labour shirked the fight and shirked the war. However, his right hon. Friends the present and previous Prime Ministers thanked the Labour party and the House for the solidarity that had been shown to our armed forces during the Gulf conflict. The Minister made a pathetic attempt to pick up a few votes.

A policy decision has been taken in the Conservative party to attack the Labour party on defence. That is fine; we are happy to justify our position. *[Interruption.]* Our position is a darn sight stronger than that of the Secretary of State, especially when, as three or four hon. Members have pointed out, his generals were engaged in a Pontius Pilate act in the reorganisation of the Army. Because he is afraid of the political consequences, he handed over the decision to the colonels and the generals. That is not my criticism; that has been said by the Secretary of State's right hon. and hon. Friends.

The previous Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Gentleman—I use the word "gentleman" advisedly, because he was a gentleman in his conduct of the business of the Ministry of Defence—paraphrased his right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and told the Secretary of State for Defence how he should go about his business. He said—he can check the record tomorrow—how he should continue the process, which is exactly what the previous Prime Minister said to the present Prime Minister. The wisdom of the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) is needed by the House. When Ministers are running and electorally scared, they need the cool,

calm wisdom of senior members of their party with a little experience—for example, the former Secretary of State for Defence. He put his finger right on it.

All hon. Members have asked about the criteria used in cutting the strength of the Army. We have had no answer to that question. At no time over the past few months have Ministers put forward any proposals.

I must plead a special interest: I am a former member of the Welsh Regiment and of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, but I shall not again put the case for the fusiliers, since it was so ably put by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris)——

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I know that he is embarrassed because of his position as a former member of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, but as one from Wrexham, the regimental headquarters of that regiment, I should like to put the case on his behalf. It is ridiculous that a country the size of Wales should be cut down to one regiment, given that we recruit so well and constitute such a high proportion of the Army's numbers.

Mr. Rogers: I agreed to make a short wind-up speech so I will not reiterate the arguments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon. The Welsh dimension in this matter is unique. Seven per cent. of the Army's requirements are recruited from Wales—there is no problem with recruitment, therefore. I see that the Minister of State, Welsh Office is in his place; he represents a Welsh-speaking constituency, so he knows that at least 40 per cent. of the Royal Welch Fusiliers speak Welsh.

If we believe in a regimental system at all, we should keep the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Recruitment, morale and the relationships between comrades from the same community, living and working together in danger—all are improved under the regimental system, so I suggest that the Secretary of State reconsider the case of the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Having discharged my obligation to my old regiment, I wish to turn to some of the speeches that we have heard today. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) talked of a crude Treasury carve-up of the Army. He was right. Everyone knows that these cuts are Treasury driven, not strategically driven. We are worried about that lack of appraisal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) talked about how regiments help former members. The regimental system is the backbone of the British Army and it would be a sad day if it were ever done away with. In a small way, I have had reason to be grateful to the Welsh Regiment benevolent fund—after I emerged from the Army. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) made much the same point in a telling speech.

The former Secretary of State for Defence, in a superb speech, told the Government how they should behave. I hope that we shall hear a great deal more from him before he leaves the House. I also pay tribute to the speech by the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who made a thoughtful and constructive contribution. He and I have often crossed swords on defence matters, but I found his speech extremely thought provoking.

Opposition Members do not need to criticise the Government. In today's debate, Conservative Members have said that we may put the armed forces in such a state that they will be unable to fight; and that we had to strip down our forces in Germany so as to be able to fight in the Gulf—because they were not properly equipped.

The Government's failure to implement a correct procurement policy on the basis of competitive tendering is destroying proper procurement methods. The hon. Member for South Dorset said, significantly, that he would not award credit marks for the decision-making in the Ministry of Defence. When will the Minister produce his paper on "Options for Change" for civilians and civil servants? We have one for the Air Force, one for the Army and one for the Navy and we want to know when they are coming forward.

Mr. Tom King: Probably next week.

Mr. Rogers: That information is a substantial step forward. We have at least had one announcement from the Secretary of State. The most telling remark made by the hon. Member for South Dorset was that within the Conservative party and within the House—the forums where there ought to be discussion—there has been no strategic discussion of the major issues. The role of the armed forces and of the Army has not been identified, but these cuts will fall anyway.

We naturally paid great attention to what the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) said after his valiant service in the Gulf. We pay tribute to those who received honours last week. I mention that in particular because we were appalled by the shabby and contemptible attack by the Minister, who tried to divide the House on an issue on which it had not been divided throughout the war. As the hon. Member for Wimbledon said after returning from the Gulf, our forces out there were pleased to know that they had the backing of the whole House. That makes the Minister's statement more contemptible. I am sure that he will live to regret politically what he said.

What the Government are doing is appalling, particularly when they know that before the war, and for part of the war, British arms were going into Iraq and Jordan. A wholly owned Government subsidiary, International Military Services, had a secret deal with the Iraqis. The Minister has denied that at Question Time, but we shall see who told lies in this matter. I am not using the word lies tonight, Mr. Speaker, but lies have been peddled about other matters in the arms trade with Iraq, as will be shown over the next few weeks.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) made a plea for the Territorial and reserve forces, a point made time and again by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Last year, the Government said that if they reduced the regular forces, they would rely more on Territorials and reservists, so why are they now cutting reserve forces? What is the point of having such forces if they cannot fulfil their obligations?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) spoke about compensation for the Grenadiers and other injured service men. I appeal to the Government to look at this matter again, as more and more evidence comes out of the plight of service men, particularly the person mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley. That case needs looking at again.

When I attempted to intervene constructively in the Minister's speech—he would not give way—I wanted to ask him a question that has since been brought up by other hon. Members: how do three legless service men take on

[Mr. Rogers]

the might of the Ministry of Defence? The Minister has said that they can go to court and the lawyers can sort the matter out, but who would fund the case? I know that, for able-bodied people, going to court and being involved in legal issues is a great trauma. However, for disabled ex-service men it must be traumatic to think that, as a result of a tragic accident that took place during their service to their country, they now have to go through the court procedure once again. The Minister has said that the matter has been handed over to the lawyers. That is rather like the answer that was given to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) who asked a question about insurance policies. The Minister replied:

"The Department has, however, arranged for service men to have access to various commercial insurance policies at advantageous premium rates"—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1991; Vol 193, c. 580.]

What a way to treat our service men. My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South is right to talk about what happens after the flags start waving, the band starts playing and the service men march while the Secretary of State wraps himself in the union jack and takes all the credit for what has gone on. What is left is the human debris that result from tragic accidents. Those people are forced to go to court and through the legal system to get proper compensation.

9.45 pm

Mr. Archie Hamilton: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate.

First, I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) once again on having gone to the Gulf. I do not know whether hon. Members realise it, but I am afraid that the Army records with his name on as a reservist were not completely accurate. My hon. Friend was down as a reservist with the Life Guards rather than as a medical officer. The Life Guards recruit all its medical officers directly, whereas many other units of the British Army take their medical officers from the Royal Army Medical Corps. In the circumstances, it would not have been necessary for my hon. Friend to volunteer for service in the Gulf, and I believe that it was particularly creditable of him to put his name forward when it was not necessary to do so.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) raised a number of questions, one of which related to the EOD squadron in Kuwait, which is working there in support of Royal Ordnance. The hon. Member made a number of points about the deployment of that squadron, but this is not the first time that service men have supported British firms. I agree that that has not happened in the particular circumstances of Kuwait, but there has been a tendency in the Ministry of Defence to give support to British firms. We are proud to do so.

It is obvious that Royal Ordnance would not have got the contract had it not been for the support given to it by the Royal Engineers. From the time of the liberation of Kuwait the Royal Engineers have provided emergency humanitarian relief to Kuwaitis, including the clearance of unexploded ordnance. 21 EOD squadron will ensure a smooth handover to Royal Ordnance, giving it some time to assemble its team which will continue to work after the Royal Engineers return to the United Kingdom.

The sappers' task will involve predominantly making safe ordnance, aircraft bombs and military booby traps, but only where no greater risk arises than is acceptable in peacetime operations. That task will also include the provision of advice to Royal Ordnance and its work force.

Explosive disposal is by its nature hazardous, but the Ministry of Defence has stipulated that the officer commanding has the right to refuse any task he believes to involve greater risk than in peacetime. He has already exercised his authority over requests to clear ordnance within the oilfields.

The deployment is for a transitional period of four months, by which time we expect Royal Ordnance to be fully capable of assuming the whole task. This is a unique situation requiring a flexible, practical response and is unlikely to be repeated.

It was very agreeable to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) speaking in the debate. This is probably the first time that he has spoken in a defence debate since he ceased to be my Secretary of State. I welcome him back here. I should like to get the statistics right on the number of Scottish personnel who served in the Gulf. We reckon that Scottish personnel accounted for about 9 per cent. of the Army's presence in the Gulf, and that about 5 per cent. of the Army as a whole is Scottish. Certainly the Scottish presence in the Gulf represented a larger percentage than that in the Army as a whole. We owe a great debt to the Scottish regiments and the Scottish service men for the role that they played.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr made a number of constructive points on the reduction in the size of the Army. I assure him that in reaching final decisions on the Army's future structure we will take into account all relevant factors. In particular, we shall have regard to the need to produce a fully manned and fully effective force. I know that he realises that even with our reduced Rhine Army it will continue to make a contribution to the Northern Ireland roulement, as will other units in the rapid reaction corps, which will be based in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) talked about the importance of our reserves. I know that the future of the Territorial Army is a subject of great importance to many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. I can assure the House that we are closely examining our military requirements and giving careful thought to TA units having a more general role than at present and providing a framework for expansion in times of increased threat. We are certain that the TA will play a vital part in meeting our future defence needs and that it will retain a challenging role, which it will undertake with accustomed dedication and enthusiasm.

The question arose of proportionate reductions. It is worth saying that the TA depends on the Regular Army for all the training that it receives, and that that is carried out by Regular personnel. If it is necessary, as it is, to reduce the number of Regular personnel, some reduction of the TA is inevitable as well, although it does not have to be proportionate.

Mr. Brazier: My right hon. Friend used the phrase, "retain a challenging role". I serve in the Territorial Army and I have many friends who do so. We in the TA do not feel that there is a real and challenging role for us, and that

is leading to the disillusion of so many good TA units. The essence of the role of any force, whether regular or reserve, is that it should be available for war. It is a sad fact that no TA units were sent as units to the Gulf. That is the principal cause of the drop in morale and the reduction in numbers and in attendances within the TA over the past few months.

Mr. Hamilton: I hear what my hon. Friend says. It is not the first time that I have heard that criticism. If we are to embark upon an operation such as the Gulf war, we must take into account that if we call up or use any reservists for such an operation we shall disrupt civilian lives, jobs and so forth. However, members of the TA served as reservists and played a role. We were grateful for what they did.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North talked about surplus Ministry of Defence housing. I assure him that the Government are determined that no more than the minimum and necessary number of service dwellings should be retained. The Army's housing stock is now about 14 per cent. smaller than it was in 1981. However, many empty properties are not suitable for disposal because they are undergoing restoration or repair, or are already earmarked for service families. We are aiming to dispose of a significant number of surplus Army quarters over the next two years. As many of these as possible will be sold to service families through the services discount scheme.

Many hon. Members have taken the opportunity to talk about decisions that are made on regiments, and we have heard of skilful and impressive plans for regiments throughout the land. I must say that there has not been complete consistency in the arguments that my colleagues and I have been asked to consider. The House will not be surprised to hear that I have nothing to say tonight about the future of individual units. It is right that hon. Members should state their cases, but it is equally right that the Government should not be rushed into premature announcements.

It is important that the Army is being consulted, but there is no question of Ministers shirking their responsibility. The ultimate decision will be taken by Ministers, but, my God, we would get some criticism from Opposition Members if we were not consulting the Army on what its future should be. It is right that we should look to the Army itself to put proposals to us, following which we shall make final decisions. I shall find it regrettable if the vast bulk or the totality of the decisions that have to be made is not in the form of proposals from the Army. The less that politics is involved in the matter, the better. I believe that the military is in a position to make the best decisions. I hope that it will produce proposals for us that will cover all the decisions that have to be taken.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) raised the difficult issue of the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, and the position of those injured before May 1987. As he will recall, it was exceptionally agreed that ex gratia payments should be made for those cases arising between the date of the announcement of the intention to repeal and the repeal itself. The House will recall that, after much debate, it was not possible to make the repeal retrospective; to have done so would have inevitably created unacceptable injustices and anomalies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South rightly praised the role of the Territorial Army in the Gulf, which I touched on in my opening remarks. He also asked about the arrangements for bounties payable to those serving in the Gulf. The arrangements made for the Gulf reflected the very special circumstances of that campaign. I have to tell my hon. Friend that there are no plans to extend the arrangements to those volunteering for short tours in places where such personnel are regularly posted. My hon. Friend mentioned Northern Ireland, and I am sorry that I cannot meet him on that point.

A number of hon. Members asked about the thinking underlying "Options for Change". There was concern that it might be led by resource restraints rather than by policy. As I explained at length earlier, that fear is unfounded. "Options for Change" is based firmly on an appreciation of the momentous changes under way in Europe. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) said that NATO had given serious thought to what the future strategy should be, and in particular the future size of the Army front line has been arrived at by making an informed judgment covering both the needs of purely national tasks, such as the Army's role in Northern Ireland, and the role that we are asked to play in NATO's future force structure. Having determined the appropriate size of our front line in that way, it is essential that we ensure that arms and civilian support are reduced by at least the same scale, and that we are doing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden also mentioned the importance of the work undertaken by NATO. The role that will now be played by the United Kingdom is a key one, of which we can be proud. He rightly said that that role will not be cheap. I assure him that we are fully committed to equipping and training our forces properly for their future tasks. The announcement that I made tonight on MLRS2 is another demonstration of that commitment.

That is one reason why it may appear to the House that the reductions in the services for which we are asking are drastic. We want to be able to ensure that the troops that we have are properly funded, that we have a significant equipment budget, that we have sufficient money to spend on the training that the troops need, and that we can meet the accommodation and other aspects of service life that are so important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) mentioned the reduction in our forces in Germany, and asked that our support structures there be reduced. We will be looking hard at the scope for such action. We have already announced the closure of a number of depots in Germany and elsewhere on the continent, and further decisions will be announced. We are determined that the tail will be reduced, although we must not overlook the need to maintain effective support for the teeth of the Army. Recent events in the Gulf have left us in no doubt about the importance of an effective logistics system.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) expressed concern about the efforts to deploy armoured forces to the Gulf. I remind him that we deployed units of war establishment without the level of mobilisation of reserves that would have been available in a major European conflict. The harsh conditions in the Gulf, with the exceptional demand on our equipment and spares, was also an important factor.

[Mr. Hamilton]

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North was concerned about what progress had been made with IFF —identification friend and foe—for armoured vehicles, following the A-10 incident. Schemes to fit armoured vehicles with sophisticated electronic identification systems have been considered both by the MOD and by NATO. However, operational analysis has shown that such systems can only complement rather than replace visual identification. An electronic identification system may be attractive, but until complex technical problems have been overcome, such a system is not practical. The need to prevent such tragic incidents occurring in future will be given careful consideration, as we study the conduct of the campaign and the conclusions to be drawn from it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the need for proper planning and resources for resettlement as the Army reduces in size. Those leaving the Army as that happens will have access to the same level of resettlement support as is provided to all leaving the services at the present. They will receive advice and counselling, and up to 28 days' training, to equip them with new skills or to assist them in transferring their existing skills to the civilian job market.

In addition, they will be able to obtain assistance with finding a new job from the Army resettlement employment liaison service, or from the Officers' Association or Regular Forces Employment Association—both of which receive funding from the Ministry of Defence.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Points of Order

10.1 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. After the Prime Minister's understandably long statement this afternoon, you expressed the hope that, given that 35 right hon. and hon. Members wanted to speak in the Army debate, speeches would be kept short —especially those made by members of both Front Benches. As things turned out, the speeches of the Minister for State and of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) together lasted—understandably, because of interventions—100 minutes. Is it not a matter of some concern to the House, when a time limit is imposed on Back-Benchers, that a speech of 56 minutes should be made by the Minister?

When I asked the Leader of the House on 6 June whether there would be any time in tonight's debate for reflection on the Gulf war—of the kind that the House had after the Crimean war, the Jameson raid, and the Falklands war—he replied:

"As I said earlier, when we are debating defence matters, it may be possible to raise some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman mentions."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 1991; Vol. 192, c. 420.]

For many of us, and particularly the dissenters, that has not proved possible.

Mr. Speaker: I understand the hon. Member's point.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I like to give way to interventions if possible—and I did so during my speech. I will take guidance from you, Mr. Speaker, if I should not do so in future, to keep my speeches shorter.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to give the Minister that sort of guidance. By way of general guidance, I suggest that if Departments give their Ministers a 15-minute speech, it may turn out to be a 30-minute speech, whereas a speech intended to last for 30 minutes may take longer. It is a question of self-discipline. If the speeches made by the Minister and by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) had each lasted only 30 minutes, it would have been possible for other hon. Members to be heard.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I refer to item 9 on the Order Paper, concerning rates of duty on mineral oils, which seeks to set taxes two years in advance—for the first time, without a Bill being put before Parliament. That seems contrary to Standing Order No. 53. Is it in order, therefore, for the House to consider that motion?

Mr. Speaker: I have been informed that motion No. 9 will not be moved tonight.

Church of England (Care of Churches)

Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.

10.3 pm

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Michael Alison): I beg to move,

That the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

This is a long and detailed Measure, but essentially it is not complex—and it is both reasonable and desirable in its objectives. It is primarily concerned, as the Ecclesiastical Committee's report makes clear, with the care and conservation of churches and land, and articles belonging to them, in the parishes of the Church of England. Within that overall aim the Measure seeks to secure two broad objectives: first, to strengthen and extend the Church of England's legal and administrative arrangements for the care and conservation of churches; secondly, to extend and reform the general law relating to ecclesiastical courts and their officers.

The background to the Measure is that the Church of England enjoys the privilege of being exempt from secular planning law, for example from listed building consent, so far as repairs, alterations or additions to its parish churches and other consecrated or dedicated buildings is concerned. However, that privilege—known as ecclesiastical exemption—is not unqualified. Those responsible for parish churches—generally parochial church councils and the incumbent—have to secure a form of permission called a faculty before they can undertake any repairs, alterations or additions to their churches.

This measure is required essentially to reinforce and modernise the faculty procedure. It was part of the agreement between Church and state in 1977, which inaugurated the granting of state aid for churches in use, that the Church of England, via its General Synod, undertook to review and improve the operation of that so-called faculty jurisdiction.

Turning briefly to the more detailed provisions of the Measure, it amends legislation in three main areas: care and inspection, which is part II; the amendment of the faculty jurisdiction, in part III; and certain reforms of the ecclesiastical courts, which is also in part III.

The measure provides for the diocesan advisory committee, which advises parochial church councils, and the diocesan chancellor—who is an ecclesiastical judge—on the care and conservation of places of worship, to have a written constitution including provisions for three members who are to be appointed after consultation with the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, the various national amenity societies and the relevant local authorities.

The diocesan advisory committee will be required to make an annual report to the diocesan synod and will have its own budget for the first time. Paragraph 3 of schedule 3 amends the Inspection of Churches Measure 1955, requiring a bishop to establish a five-yearly inspection scheme for all churches in his diocese and to extend the scheme to certain valuable or vulnerable articles in churches. The carrying out of inspections is to be extended to chartered building surveyors, in addition to architects.

Clause 12 makes it clear that a consistory court—the diocesan court presided over by the chancellor of the diocese—has power to grant faculties, subject to conditions, and enables the court to grant faculties authorising the archdeacon to carry out, at the petitioner's expense, where he or she has defaulted, the works authorised by the court.

Clause 13 re-enacts section 5 of the Faculty Jurisdiction Measure 1964 in more concise language, but with the addition of five new provisions. First, the consistory court is empowered to require any party, other than the petitioner, whom it considers responsible for any act or default which led to the faculty proceedings being instituted, to meet the whole or part of the cost of the proceedings and the expenses of any works authorised by the faculty—that is in clause 13(1). Secondly, the clause reinforces an existing power of the court which enables it to add, as a further party to the case, any person alleged to be so responsible—that is for any act or default in respect of which the court proceedings had been initiated—even if that person is an outsider. That is in clause 13(2). The court may also require that person to attend a hearing—clause 13(3)—and may treat failure to attend without reasonable excuse as a contempt of court—clause 13(11).

Thirdly, the consistory court is given power to issue an injunction restraining a person from committing or continuing in an unlawful act in respect of any church, any article belonging to a church or any churchyard in the diocese—that is in clause 13(4). Fourthly, the court is empowered to make a restoration order to restore the position that existed before the unlawful act was committed—that is in clause 13(5)—and a time limit of six years is imposed on certain enforcement proceedings under the clause. In my third and fourth examples, the consistory court may act on its own motion, on the application of the archdeacon or that of any other person who appears to the court to have a sufficient interest.

Clause 15 requires a chancellor, or an archdeacon exercising delegated faculty jurisdiction, to seek the advice of the diocesan advisory committee before dealing finally with any faculty matter. Exceptionally, if the chancellor considers what is proposed sufficiently urgent, he may grant a faculty, or issue an injunction, without the committee's advice.

Clause 15 was amended during its consideration by the General Synod to require the chancellor to seek the advice of the diocesan advisory committee, rather than to obtain that advice. That may seem a bit of hair-splitting, but, during consultation with the Department of the Environment and English Heritage, it was pointed out that in certain circumstances a long delay over a faculty could be detrimental to the church fabric, and that, if a reasonable length of time had elapsed since the seeking of the committee's advice—hitherto unforthcoming—the chancellor should have power to go ahead with that advice. That is expected to happen only very rarely, but a measure of flexibility would be provided when the chancellor thought it desirable.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Delay in decision-making can indeed be very damaging to fabric, especialy if it happens over a winter and frost has eaten into stone that may not have been pointed as well as it should have been. Who can make the decision that work must be done quickly, even if all the money is not available? This is a serious problem.

Mr. Alison: The chancellor of the diocese, or the archdeacon and his associated officers, can bypass the diocesan advisory committee for precisely the reason that the hon. Gentleman has so perceptively given. The requirement is that they should seek advice, not that they should obtain it.

Having sought the advice—and its materialisation, for whatever reason, having been delayed—the archdeacon and his relevant fellow officers can bypass it and proceed to implement the vital repairs or other emergency action that may be needed for the reasons, perhaps climatic, that the hon. Gentleman has helpfully cited.

Clause 18 re-enacts, with modifications, section 2(4) of the Faculty Jurisdiction Measure 1964. It empowers the chancellor to execute an instrument authorising demolition, or partial demolition, of a church without a faculty, in specified emergencies—if, the matter being urgent, there is not enough time for a faculty to be obtained. The terms of the instrument are to supplement, not exclude, any listed-building controls that may be applicable.

Where there is total demolition of a listed church, or where an order for such demolition is proposed, the church will cease to be an ecclesiastical building for ecclesiastical purposes and the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 will apply. Listed building consent will be required in the same way as it would be for a secular building.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that in the other place questions were asked about the extent of the powers in clause 18 to avoid normal planning constraints and to agree to demolition or partial demolition. Reading between the lines, it was suggested that the Minister who spoke for the Department of the Environment would reconsider the matter. Can the right hon. Gentleman give a considered view on whether clause 18 goes too far?

Mr. Alison: I think that I can help the hon. Gentleman —I am coming to that point. I remind him that where full or total demolition is proposed, for which an order must be made in advance, the building ceases to be a ecclesiastical building altogether.

Mr. Hughes: Altogether?

Mr. Alison: The order is the operative factor. Once an order is made, the building ceases to be an ecclesiastical building and therefore automatically falls within the ambit of the full secular law.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned the weather affecting churches. The right hon. Gentleman will remember that the beautiful little church in Bolsover was seriously affected by mining subsidence. I remember the arguments and the questions that were being asked in the House about what we were going to do about that beautiful little church. All sorts of things were being said, but in the end the Church Commissioners caved in and did not fight their corner. My question is about churches in mining areas, which can be seriously affected by mining subsidence. Where do we stand?

Mr. Alison: In the context of this Measure, if subsidence occurred in Bolsover or near the hon. Gentleman's constituency that was so detrimental to the parish church that it was about to collapse around the heads of the worshipping congregation, that would be an emergency and the church authorities would wish to secure authority totally to demolish it or it might fall down when people were worshipping. In such circumstances, the church authorities would have to publish an order for its demolition, and from then on it would cease to be an ecclesiastical building and would be subject to the full secular law on listed building control. Normal planning regulations and requirements would apply to the way in which it was handled thereafter.

The point that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) made about the availability of compensation for subsidence, though interesting and important, is not within the ambit of the Measure that I am introducing. I would be happy to debate that with the hon. Gentleman on another occasion.

Mr. Haynes: The right hon. Gentleman is not doing very well. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) did not get a great deal of help from the Church Commissioners. The matter dragged on and on. If that could happen in Bolsover, it could happen in any small mining village. The people could end up without a church.

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman is being unfair. I am afraid that we are wandering slightly outside the ambit of the Measure, although I am happy to travel down this road with so important a navigator as the hon. Member for Ashfield.

The hon. Gentleman is slightly unfair to the Church Commissioners. They coughed up plenty of money. It was impossible to do so, except in the context of protracted legal negotiations between the parochial church council, the incumbent of that church and British Coal. Those complicated negotiations involved liability. Such negotiations were unavoidable, but they were concluded and the parish council was well endowed with compensation.

I return to the point made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). Where there is partial demolition, the ecclesiastical exemption will continue to apply. That does not mean, however, that the chancellor of the diocese will have unfettered discretion. Clauses 18(1) and 18(2) of the Measure mirror the provisions of the 1990 Act, and those requirements must be satisfied before the diocesan chancellor can issue an instrument for partial demolition. The relevant sections of the 1990 Act contain four groups of requirements upon which secular authorities insist in planning law in respect of the demolition of certain listed buildings. Clauses 18(1) and (2) transpose those sections, in effect to apply pari passu to the ecclesiastical authorities within their ecclesiastical exemption and faculty jurisdiction. They will mirror the requirements of secular or state planning law in the functions that are discharged within the scope of ecclesiastical exemption. Therefore, there will be no lack of proper supervision or control as a result of ecclesiastical exemption—the diocesan chancellors will behave exactly as if they were the secular planning authorities.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his careful and clear explanation. This is obviously a matter of general importance involving the conservation of important buildings. Does one conclude from the right hon. Gentleman's comments that the emergency powers granted to a diocesan chancellor in partial demolition cases will not give him any greater power under the church legislation over churches than

planning authorities have under equivalent secular planning legislation? Although there are emergency powers, are they equally constrained, or does an emergency give additional rights against which there would be protection in secular planning law?

Mr. Alison: Only partial demolition is relevant in this respect. I believe that the hon. Gentleman and everyone else is satisfied on total demolition. Although some ecclesiastical independence is retained because of ecclesiastical exemption for partial demolition, the ecclesiastical authorities have done exactly what the hon. Gentleman seeks—they have limited themselves as the 1990 Act would have limited them had it applied to them directly.

Right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that there is a delicate balance to be struck between the liturgical needs of parishioners and proper conservation of historic buildings. I suggest that the Measure, which received overwhelming majorities in all three houses of the General Synod at final approval stage, gets that balance about right. In moving the motion, I wish to place on record the thanks of the Church of England to the Department of the Environment for the great help which was given over a long period during drafting and consideration of the Measure.

10.24 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Scottish Presbyterians such as myself must be careful in trying to meddle in the affairs of the Church of England. In a sense, I speak in sackcloth and ashes as perhaps all hon. Members should when telling other people what to do with their ecclesiastical buildings.

I take this opportunity to say that the Crypt—not a hundred yards from here—needs urgent attention. During the past four years I have, through the Serjeant at Arms and through the Property Services Agency, asked endlessly for something to be done about the stone rot in the Crypt, especially that by the font just past the beautiful etchings of Noah and Moses. I understand that there are difficulties, possibly caused by the bomb in the 1940s, by the drainage system and by the cracks. I find it profoundly embarrassing to take knowledgeable visitors into the Crypt to see the disintegration of the stone in the beautiful marble octagonal chapel. So it is with considerable reservation that I even rise to speak.

My excuse is that my wife was for 12 years a member of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland and is now a member of the Scottish Ancient Monuments Board. In Scotland, we have a civilised habit whereby the Ancient Monuments Board goes on three-day visits each Whitsun and spouses are allowed to go along as paying guests. One can learn a great deal. It is against that background that I put three points to the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison).

First, I welcome the principle of quinquennial or five-yearly inspections, but who carries out those inspections? What powers are there to enforce any conclusions that might be reached?

Secondly, there follows from that the vexed question of grants from the state for church repairs. In Scotland there has been much difficulty even for great churches such as the Holy Rood in Stirling, because money that might have been forthcoming from state sources was not for a long time forthcoming. It is unreal to expect churches, which as a result of population changes have small congregations, to undertake the work that they perhaps should undertake.

Thirdly, I do not come from Norfolk or Suffolk but I regard the wonderful wool churches—the great monuments of medieval European architecture—as part of my heritage as much as anybody else in these islands. All praise to the work of Lady Harrod and others who have devoted the latter part of their lives to trying to do something about the problems. Nevertheless, the time has come for substantially more state help.

In a different context I, like the Secretary of State for the Environment, went to Heveningham hall. I shall not go into detail other than to say that it had been beautifully restored inside. I went there at the invitation of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). I have never seen better restoration of wood and plaster work, the features on which I am competent to pass judgment. But what on earth is going to be done about the Suffolk and Norfolk churches which were in once prosperous farming areas, but whose congregations have now dwindled and perhaps moved to the towns? Does the right hon. Gentleman have any thoughts on the vital question of giving state help to churches which are part of the medieval European heritage but which cannot be supported by their local congregations to the extent that repairs now demand?

10.29 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): My intervention will be on a similar subject to that raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I welcome this timely Measure, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) for clarifying the point that I raised earlier.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow has posed a question that was left unanswered: how sure can we be that historic church buildings in England are adequately funded? Let me give an example. I am a member of the congregation of St. James's, Bermondsey, a beautiful Waterloo church in the diocese of Southwark, which can be seen from the railway line coming out of London Bridge station. We have just restored that church and hung new bells. The stone work has also been cleaned. All that was made possible only by our going round seeking special funding —in this case, funding gratefully received partly from English Heritage and partly from the London Docklands development corporation. There are other churches that are very near to St. James's but outside the London Docklands development corporation catchment area, whose congregations or incumbents could not have gone to the LDDC, which has helped the architectural heritage in London, and which has done excellent work north of the river, in the docklands churches of Tower Hamlets, Wapping and the Isle of Dogs, and also, I believe, in Newham.

Our concern is that congregations and, indeed, dioceses often cannot raise the necessary funds. That is certainly true if they are in inner-city areas or areas that were once prosperous. I see that the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) is in her place. I do not mean it impolitely when I say that I know that there are some areas of her constituency which were once more prosperous than they are now and where the capacity of congregations to keep their churches in a good state of repair is substantially

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

reduced. That is also true of very rural parts of the country. My family comes from Herefordshire, which has some beautiful churches whose congregations number a handful of people, if that. Suffolk and Norfolk face similar difficulties. In some East Anglian churches, there is one service a month because the vicar has seven or eight parishes to look after.

It is right that we should update our procedure. I welcome the fact that we are addressing the care of churches this year just as we addressed the care of cathedrals last year. We welcomed the arrangements, announed last year, whereby some state aid would be given for cathedrals, but it must be said that many churches are still equally in need of support, albeit not necessarily in the same way. I hope that the right hon. Member for Selby will be able to answer, at least in part, the concern felt by people—whatever their denomination if they are Christians, or religion if they are not, or views if they are people of no religious persuasion—that the heritage of Christian buildings throughout the country should be preserved and that too many of them have been under threat in recent years.

10.33 pm

Mr. Alison: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, let me respond first to the points raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who asked about the five-yearly inspection, which I mentioned in my opening remarks.

The inspections will be carried out, as they usually are at present, by architects and also—as a result of the powers taken in the Measure—by surveyors. The inspection may result in recommendations to make a change, repair or improvement to a particular building, either on the initiative of the inspection body or person or possibly in conjunction with the parochial church council and the incumbent of the building inspected. Wherever the initiative comes from, either the inspector or the incumbent and PCC have then to submit the scheme for corroboration and advice to the diocesan advisory committee, which is an expert body. In due course, that body will issue a faculty or permission for the work to be carried out. A systematic, regular inspection system results in reasonable recommendations for change, subject to the advice of the diocesan advisory committee, being authorised by the faculty jurisdiction procedure.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to money. I speak with some diffidence as I do not know enough about the affairs of the Church of Scotland or the Episcopal Church of Scotland to know exactly how their finances work. However, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that since 1977 the state has made substantial sums, running into many millions of pounds, available to the Church of England for the maintenance of our historic heritage of old and splendid ecclesiastical buildings. That to some extent bears upon the point raised by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who referred to the problem of raising enough money for many of our fine buildings, the huge range of needs and the relatively limited resources.

The grant aid scheme for churches in use is to be reviewed by the Department of the Environment in conjunction with the churches to discover how it can be refined, extended and elaborated and generally improved. There is something in view. Now that the principle of state aid has been accepted, improvements and perhaps elaboration are in prospect.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it not wrong that most of the money has, perhaps understandably, found its way to the restoration of great cathedrals like Wells and York instead of trickling down to some of those country churches where a little money could make a difference?

Mr. Alison: Since 1977, the lion's share of the money has gone to the parish churches. The Government have only recently accepted the principle of state aid for cathedrals. On the whole, cathedrals have had a better, more photogenic base on which to appeal for substantial funds. Many of them have, with good management and before any state aid was in prospect, succeeded in raising considerable sums of money. State aid is now in prospect for cathedrals, but since 1977 the bulk of the money has been available for parish churches.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman has taken the debate slightly further by saying that a Department of the Environment reconsideration is in prospect. If that is so, I want to record a bid for a subject to be reconsidered; namely former church buildings such as the palaces of the Bishops of Winchester and Southwark which are beautiful buildings, but which no one can identify because there is nothing on those buildings to tell people what they are. If the DOE is reviewing the way in which it can help, it can assist by allowing people to be informed through English Heritage about the historical importance of buildings.

Mr. Alison: I take note of what the hon. Gentleman says. I cannot make a very intelligent comment on it other than to suggest—and this is an almost anarchical, entirely improper and unofficial suggestion—that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey should persuade the Bishop of Southwark to consecrate or dedicate the building he mentioned so that it becomes an ecclesiastical building. It can then come within the ambit of all the marvellous things that we are seeking to do. However, he must not take that advice as ex cathedra.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My right hon. Friend should watch out. The Bishops of Winchester had palaces or residences all over the place. Perhaps it would be far better to leave them buried. Now is an appropriate time to ask my right hon. Friend to pass on the thanks of the House to all those who have produced the Measures and those who look after the buildings and put in many hours of dedicated work. We are grateful for what they achieve. We would not have much of our heritage without the work of people at parish level. How pleasant it is to read part I of the Measure, which is fairly unusual in an ecclesiastical Measure. It states:

> "Any person or body carrying out functions of care and conservation under this Measure . . . shall have due regard to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission."

Such a statement of principle is very welcome, and I hope that it will be repeated on other occasions.

Mr. Alison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that helpful, constructive and agreeable accolade to those who have made an important, worthwhile, and desirable contribution in respect of this Measure.

Mr. Dalyell: I hope that the new director of works for the Palace of Westminster to be found by Saxon Bamphylde, the head-hunters, will have as his job specification the urgent architectural needs of the Palace, and not the reorganisation of staff, as the rumour is, that he be brought in to cut down, on a hatchet basis, the number of staff working in this Palace. I hope that attention will be given to the problems that I raised, such as the surrounds to the Crypt of the House of Commons.

Mr. Alison: I shall want to study carefully what the hon. Gentleman has said about the Crypt chapel. I am not quite as familiar with it as he is. I am speaking without notice. I do not think that the jurisdiction of the Crypt chapel comes within that of any diocesan authority. It is one of the peculiars, in the jargon of ecclesiastical circles, which means that it is not a royal peculiar, but just a plain peculiar. That means that the scope for taking action in respect of the needs of the Crypt chapel do not strictly come within the scope of the Measure or of the Diocese of London. I shall take further advice on the position of the Crypt chapel and will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

[Mr. Alison]

Church of England (Diocesan Boards of Education)

10.41 pm

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Michael Alison): I beg to move,

That the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

The Diocesan Boards of Education Measure replaces and repeals the Diocesan Education Committees Measure of 1955, enacted quite a few years ago. The first aim of the new Measure is to give more flexibility for diocesan boards than the 1955 Measure afforded, particularly in the light of changes since that far-off time, not least the passing of the Education Reform Act 1988. Diocesan boards have wide responsibility for education in parishes, Sunday schools and adult groups, over and above a board's specific responsibility for church schools. The schedule to the Measure gives the necessary flexibility to the composition of the diocesan boards, depending on the diocese.

The second aim of the Measure is to give financial control to the board in the matter of voluntary-aided schools where the board has to act as banker, guarantor and provider. The third aim is to allow the diocesan board to develop a strategy for church schools so that the church can be an effective and coherent partner with the state in the dual system.

Lastly, the Measure would bring diocesan boards into line with synodical government and make boards accountable to the diocesan Synod. In addition, the Education Reform Act reached the statute book in 1988, as I reminded the House, and the Measure has been drafted to take account of its new provisions.

Hon. Members will have seen that the Measure was given final approval with large majorities in all three houses of the General Synod. The one area that gave concern to some members was clause 7, which empowers a diocesan board to give directions to the governing body of the school. At all stages of the passage of the draft measure through the Synod, the Department of Education and Science and the Charity Commissioners were consulted. They raised no difficulty with regard to the clause.

Secondly, the board is specifically excluded by clause 7(5) from giving directions when a school wants to apply for grant-maintained status.

Thirdly, many of the matters on which a board might give directions would be those for which the Secretary of State would have ultimate responsibility. The House will nevertheless note that our own Ecclesiatical Committee sounded a modest although not overriding reservation about this point in paragraphs 10 and 11 of its report to the House.

I know that, in spite of the Ecclesiastical Committee's decision that the Measure is expedient, one hon. Member, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—he hoped to be with us this evening but I understand that he has been delayed and therefore sends his apologies—advises me that he still has some misgivings about the extra powers the diocesan boards are being given in the Measure.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead has raised two points with me in correspondence. As they are of general interest, it is reasonable to delay the House for a minute or two with some comments on his reservations.

First, the hon. Gentleman is worried about the future of church schools when local education authorities are reorganising or being reorganised. All too often, he believes, authorities pick on church schools to close if closures have to take place. The hon. Gentleman does not want this Measure and the enhanced powers of diocesan boards which it provides to frustrate or prevent a church school from taking a decision to apply for grant-maintained status, thus side-stepping the possible closure which the education authority may have in store for it. As I have already pointed out, clause 7(5) specifically prevents a diocesan board from frustrating any application for grant-maintained status by a voluntary-aided school.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Birkenhead expressed fears about the scope for governors of church schools in situations of change somewhat less final or sweeping than that of applying for grant-maintained status. He believes that in the new world in which schools operate nowadays, following the Education Reform Act, church schools which are successful and go-ahead will be able to attract pupils from the less successful schools. He visualises situations, however, in which a very powerful case might be put forward by some doicesan boards of education to prevent a voluntary-aided church school from maximising this opportunity and increasing its numbers up to its physical limits—particularly if some non-church state schools faced local closure as a result of the migration of children and pupils to a growing voluntary-aided church school.

I hope that I can largely reassure the hon. Gentleman on this point. If a successful church school sought to increase its intake, a diocesan board would not—indeed, it could not—overrule the aspirations of the local governors to let their school expand to its full capacity or to its so-called standard number—which is the same thing. Under the open enrolment provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988, no one can prevent the growth of a school up to the capacity of its building, should there be a parental demand that the governors wish to meet.

However, if there is an expansion beyond existing physical capacity, extra capital expenditure would logically be involved. That would raise somewhat wider issues. The diocesan board, for example, would become liable to find the 15 per cent. of capital cost not provided for by the 85 per cent. Department of Education and Science grant. It could not allow itself, however, to become a passive, residual and automatic provider of funds, in response to a school governing body's unrestricted initiative to expand its capacity. It is thus unlikely that the diocesan board, or the Secretary of State for Education and Science, would authorise extra capital expenditure on expanding a voluntary-aided church school where there is already spare capacity in the locality.

I hope that, on these two points, the hon. Member for Birkenhead will feel reassured that, within reasonable limits, school governing bodies' scope and initiative for extra enrolment, where there is the school capacity, will not be frustrated or inhibited by the Measure. The object of the Measure is to assist in the promotion of high standards in education, including the spiritual, moral,

cultural, mental and physical development of children in schools and more widely in society. Accordingly, I commend it to the House.

10.51 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): As it is for other hon. Members who were members of the Ecclesiastical Committee, this is the second time round the course for me, because we have already debated the Measure. As the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) knows, and other colleagues may be aware, I expressed some concern about the provisions in this Measure that go further in giving powers to diocesan boards than the secular legislation gives to local education authorities vis-a-vis governors of schools. In secular education, the pattern has been to hand more powers to governors, and that was the thrust of the Education Reform Act 1988. As the Ecclesiastical Committee, and those who gave evidence to it, accepted, the Measure has some moves in the other direction. There are provisions that explicitly give the diocesan board power to direct and intervene, as the right hon. Gentleman said. They come in clause 7, which is entitled:

"Powers of Board to give directions to governing bodies of aided church schools."

There was a dispute at all stages in the Synod and subsequently as to what the right test should be and whether the test of intervention should be that someone had acted unreasonably, or whether the test, as in the Measure, should be

"Where the Board is satisfied that the governing body . . . is discharging its functions . . . in a manner which is not in the best interests of the school or church schools generally".

The right hon. Gentleman rightly alluded to the two paragraphs in the report where the Ecclesiastical Committee in general, in paragraphs 10 and 11, pointed out that there was at least one circumstance where the power to intervene was questionable, because it was not subject to a final overriding decision by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. In paragraph 11, the Committee said:

"The point does not seem to the Committee to hold good, however, where the Board uses its powers under subsection (1) to direct a governing body not to take some action. If, for example, the Board gave a governing body directions not to publish proposals for changing the character of the school which the governing body was intending to publish under section 13(1)(b) of the Education Act 1980, the governing body would be under a duty not to proceed with the publication. In such a case the matter would never fall to be submitted for the Secretary of State's approval."

That report makes it clear that two of us on that committee were not happy with the majority's conclusions. Even at this late stage in the debate I should like to reiterate my concerns. They will not be unfamiliar to those who have followed this debate and they derive from my experience of recent years as a school governor in a Church of England school.

The case is quite controversial and I would be neglectful if I did not mention it in this debate. It concerns the Southwark diocesan board of education and the Bacon's Church of England secondary school. That 18th century school is to be closed at the end of this term because the governing body decided to support the proposition that the school should be a city technology college. That decision was reached when I was on that governing body and I accept that I was out-voted—I do not make any complaint about that. The school will become the first Church of England CTC to be built, and will be in Southwark, in Surrey docks in my constituency.

The governors voted to close the school and supported the proposition that the Sir Philip and Lady Harris trust and the Southwark diocesan board of education should co-sponsor a CTC. At the time of that decision, one of the complaints was that the board's principal officer—he is aware of my view—specifically set the ball rolling for the CTC, without coming out in the open and discussing it with the governors, the school community, the members of the diocesan board or the diocesan bishop. From subsequent conversations I have gathered that the whole thing happened in a rather underhand way.

As a result of that behaviour the decision to turn Bacon's from a church secondary maintained school into a CTC was considered to be additionally controversial. The staff and the head opposed the decision and many governors—in the event a minority—also opposed it. As a result it was felt that the decision did not carry the full support of the school community.

In a way, all of that is water under the bridge as the governors voted to close the school and to set up a CTC. The diocesan board, as one of the promoters, found that the matter was debated by the synod of Southwark diocese only after the event. The sequence of events meant that first the governing body decided and only then that decision subsequently went before the synod.

The Measure before us still offers the possibility of intervention by the diocesan board. Subsequently the matter can be debated by the diocesan synod as a result of the clauses to which the right hon. Member for Selby referred. I believe that that process is completely the wrong way round. If there is a major decision of principle, such as that a church school should opt out, become a CTC or be closed—all are perfectly valid options within the education system—there should be wide consultation to test the body of opinion in the diocese. That should happen before the decision is taken by the diocesan board of education or the school.

I would not have felt the need to say anything further on the subject had subsequent events not reinforced the view—I heard witnesses say the same before the Ecclesiastical Committee—that the Southwark diocesan board of education has continued to neglect the best interests of the school in major respects.

I must use this forum to give notice that, unless the complaints that I outline are dealt with adequately, the reputation of the diocesan board and of the church in Southwark will be impaired greatly. This issue is relevant to the Measure as the Measure gives to the diocesan boards powers that are greater than those of the education committee to intervene over and above the heads of governors. If the diocesan board does not have the confidence of the members of the education community, giving the board more power is not something that some of us are very willing to see happen.

There were clear terms of agreement negotiated between the governors of Bacon's school and the CTC promoters—the trust and the diocesan board—on whether children who wished to go to the city technology college should have the right of appeal if turned down, and on the rights of children and staff to be able to transfer from the school to the college. It is the strong view of many staff, including senior staff, of many of the parents of children at the school and other parents—the view is irrespective of

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

whether the parents' children still attend the school—and of the teaching unions and associations that are affected that the Church has broken its word.

I make the allegation explicitly because there is still just about time to recover the position before the end of the school year. It does Christian education no service when, having decided to go down a controversial road—to set up a Church city technology college—and having carefully negotiated terms, the Church appears clearly to break its word by failing to execute the terms of the agreement.

This general subject was carefully considered by those in the Synod, including the members of the relevant committees, who thought that there would be no abuse of powers and that it was appropriate to give the diocesan board extra powers. They may have had broader experience than mine, as I have been a school governor only once at the school in question, and once more recently in another church school in Southwark.

Despite what has been alleged, I do not advance these arguments out of pique because I have an incorrigible view that city technology colleges are so awful that I shall do everything that I can to undermine them. I have told the principal designate of the CTC that I shall support him and his staff as the college gets up and running. I have made it clear that I shall support the pupils and all those associated with the college. It is not my job to undermine a decision that has already been taken.

It is my job, however, to point out when the Church lets itself down, and there are many aggrieved people who consider that the word of the Church and of the education diocesan board in Southwark is not what it should be and is not what it was said it would be. It is felt that this experience has not shown the Church in a good light. Unless the Church and the diocesan board in Southwark end the sorry saga by putting their house in order, the end of Bacon's school, after centuries of service to the community, and the beginning of Bacon's college will have taken place against a background of an unpleasant set of circumstances. It is unfortunate that locally many feel already that the powers of the diocesan board are the last powers which should be extended.

I give the warning that recent experience in Southwark shows that it may sometimes be better to have the secular system whereby the governors have more powers relative to the education committee, as we have legislated for them to have, rather than fewer powers. I hope that what I have said with some anger on behalf of quite a large number of people with some bitterness will be heard where it is meant to be heard and that matters will be put right before it is too late.

11.4 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I am sure that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will not expect me to take up in detail his remarks about the route that has been taken by Bacon's secondary church school and its successor city technology college. I merely say in passing that I am not certain that the Inner London education authority was especially fond of Bacon's school. I think that there were differences over secular control. I recall that on several occasions education authorities tried to look away from some of the schools—often church schools, and primary schools at that—that have been popular with parents and staff, to look with more favour on schools where they thought that there was more of the ideological approach that suited their own prejudices. I pay tribute to the many members of staff, head teachers and governors of schools who have managed to stand out against some of the temporal inclinations of education authorities. School reorganisation is not a problem confined to the Church of England; the Roman Catholics have a great deal of controversy over some decisions, but by definition they are excluded from the provisions in this Measure.

During a short intervention in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) during the debate on the previous motion, I welcomed the general principle stated at the beginning of that Measure. I appreciate that it is not necessarily appropriate to this Measure, which deals with what the Secretary of State may do, and he may not want to be bound by a denominational or religious declaration of principle. The partnership between the Secretary of State, the Department and the Church authorities is, on the whole, good and it works reasonably well.

There are times when I think that some of the capital allocations to church schools have been abysmal. In London, some of the decisions that have had to be made on capital spending have not been limited by the 15 per cent. that may be raised by diocesan authorities; the problems have arisen because the capital allocation from the Department has been nil. I do not mean just small —on some occasions it has not existed.

My main point relates to clause 6—the provisions for the appointment of someone from the diocese to the committee looking after religious education not only in church schools, but in all schools within the education authority or the diocese. I fear that if 12 to 16-year-olds in church schools, as well as in non-church schools, were asked to explain the story of the prodigal son, to describe the actions of the Samaritan on the Jericho road or to go back to the Old Testament and show some understanding of the story of Ruth, only a very low proportion of them would be able to say much about any of them. They might recognise the words, "the good Samaritan", it is conceivable that some of them would recognise the words, "the prodigal son", but it is unlikely that they would have any idea of the detail of the stories or how they fit into two of the parts of the Christian faith—those of love and forgiveness.

We appear to have succeeded over the past 20 years in throwing away a great deal of our religious education, let alone our religious instruction. We have managed to devalue, by ignoring, much of our heritage—Judaeo, Christian and, to some extent, Hellenic—because we have stopped believing that we have practical measures that would allow young people to learn what many of us learned.

I am not suggesting that the Church of England provides a way to become good—I do not think that that is what the Church is for—but the Measure provides some of the mechanisms for passing down to successive generations some of what has been passed to us. I hope that, through the mechanisms of clause 6(1), people will find support in their dioceses and communities for the work of religious education, which has diminished when it should have increased.

11.8 pm

Mr. Alison: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall reply briefly to the debate.

I hope that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will not consider me unreasonable or impertinent if I do not get drawn too deeply into the affairs of Bacon's school, which the hon. Gentleman brought vividly to the attention of the Ecclesiastical Committee. Indeed, his comments are on record in the report that it makes to the House.

I wish to make one or two more general comments in view of the enhanced authority that the Measure would give to diocesan boards of education, apparently in contradistinction to the tendency in the secular schools —the ordinary maintained schools—that more and more power be devolved to the governors and away from local education authorities.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take it in good part if I say to him that had the diocesan board of education disagreed with the governors of Bacon's school in respect of its desire to become a CTC, that very power of the diocesan board of education mentioned in paragraph 11 of our report that the hon. Gentleman pinpointed—to issue to a school a direction, without any qualification or appeal, not to do a certain thing—would have put it in a position to secure precisely that which the hon. Gentleman wants—to prevent Bacon's school from taking certain action that he did not want it to take. Unfortunately, that enhanced power becomes a liability in the case he cited —but it could have been a veritable asset.

Mr. Simon Hughes: That is a fairly obvious conclusion to draw, but I would not take that view. If the diocesan board had taken a different view, its powers under the Measure—if the case had arisen next year rather than two years ago—would have allowed it to intervene. My concern remains the same. If the diocesan board had decided that the governors' view was wrong, and had used its powers to direct the governors, it could override them whichever view they had taken. The governors would have no appeal. They would have no chance of making their case to the board. The Measure's overriding power goes against the current tendency in the secular world, and the Measure permits too much in the way that it is drafted.

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman has been clear and consistent. He suggests that, whichever way a diocesan board might move, he is in principle not too happy about the enhanced authority that the Measure gives it. However, its enhanced power does bear on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) concerning religious education.

I draw attention to the functions of the board, as specified in clause 2(1), where it says that the functions of the board shall be

> "(a) to promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese, being education which is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England."

Only in Church of England schools is it possible to secure an education

"consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England."

In a controlled school, for example, although it may be a church school in origin, the religious education that it provides must be in accordance with the local education authority's agreed syllabus. It does not have to be the much finer and more highly flavoured religious input that is appropriate to a voluntary-aided school, where it may be possible to secure education that is

"consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England."

I make that point because it is possible, as matters now stand, with the considerable powers that are in the hands of a school governing body, for a new incumbent to enter the parish and to become chairman of the local church school's governing body. A new set of parochial church council members, who may be of an entirely transitory character, could also turn up on the school governing body. Then, hey presto! A case was brought to my attention in the past week by those who have been advising me about this Measure. A school governing body, made up of a not particularly interested incumbent and some not very committed parochial church council members can suddenly decide that they do not want the bore and the threat of having to raise the 15 per cent. of the total capital sums which they are required to find as part of their voluntary-aided status. On one fine summer's evening and in one vote, the school governing body then decide that they will opt out of voluntary-aided status and will opt in to controlled status. Through the single vote and decision of a group of people in the parish, who may be gone in five years' time, the whole of the purposes of clause 2(1)(a) of this Measure, which is to secure

"the promotion of education . . . consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England;",

can be thrown out of the window.

In those circumstances, it seems reasonable that when a school governing body decides that it wants to change the status of the school in a way that undermines and evacuates those very qualities of high calibre religious education in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England, and when it decides to throw those out in a casual decision to opt for controlled status, the diocesan board should have the right to say no, to say that that is too draconian and final. It should have the right to tell them that it undermines the whole purpose of voluntary-aided church schools and the provision of quality religious education which the boards of education are there to promote.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and also to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) for raising the issue. This is a very important debate. There is a strong argument for ensuring the protection of Christian education against maverick decisions by transitory people or careless custodians. However, there are ways of achieving that through a dialogue, just as when we make a decision in the House it has to be dealt with in another place and we have to consider what they think.

There is scope for dialogue between a governing body and a diocesan board. The question is whether one allows dialogue or an unquestioned arrogation of rights—telling people what to do with no question of their debating it. I am not saying that there should not be that sort of support from a diocesan board concerned about the fundamentals. I share the view of the hon. Member for Eltham that, unfortunately, the product of all our efforts may be that in many church schools the fundamentals are not clearly propagated by even a combination of the diocesan board and the governing body.

Mr. Alison: Dialogue is one thing, but a decision has to be taken. In the type of case that I have cited—where there is the possible loss of voluntary-aided status because of a unilateral decision by a school's governing body—although dialogue over the decision is desirable, someone has to bite the bullet and have the final say. Diocesan boards of education should have the power to prevent voluntary-aided Church of England schools from opting out and thereby losing the input of distinctive Church of England education. Dialogue is important, and if I knew more about Bacon's school I would be able to comment more constructively on whether there was adequate consultation. Nevertheless, even if one accepts that, the provision in the Measure is desirable for those reasons.

Mr. Hughes: Perhaps I should have used the word co-decision rather than dialogue. Sometimes there is an advantage in ensuring that a decision has to pass through two stages. Perhaps that would be a more secure way to achieve the objectives that the proponents of the Measure and those who are concerned about the greater powers on one side are looking for. If that can be achieved in practice all the time, perhaps it will be a good outcome of this change and this debate.

Mr. Alison: I take the point. Paragraph 9.3 of our report states that the board of education

"is required to make a report to the next meeting of the diocesan synod in respect of any directions given by it under the clause".

I know that that is closing the door after the horse has bolted, and I fear that it will provide no consolation for the hon. Gentleman. I will, however, ensure that what he has said is brought to the attention of the relevant authorities.

I hope that I have dealt adequately with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

Planning Appeals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

11.20 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I am delighted to be able to raise a matter that pertains specifically to my constituency. It concerns the way in which the Department of the Environment's planning appeals mechanism works in practice—which, to local residents, seems beyond belief.

Last year, a planning application in the name of Mr. I. J. Reed to run an amusement centre at 60 High road, Willesden, was refused by Brent council. Mr. Reed appealed to the Department of the Environment, and the appeal was heard on 4 April 1991. CETRA—the local residents' association, which is very strong and has the support and respect of all the local political parties—objected to the application on the grounds that the centre would add nothing to the environment or to shopping facilities, and that both the Willesden green plan and the unitary development plan discouraged such use in a primary shopping area.

On 31 May, the Department issued its findings—that such use would be allowed, on certain conditions. Mr. Reed stated that no person under the age of 18 would be admitted, although that condition had not been laid down by the Department. The premises now need a licence, issued by a Brent council sub-committee, and CETRA has submitted an objection to the issuing of a licence.

CETRA must show that Mr. Reed's other amusement centres are not complying with the conditions of planning permission and/or licensing regulations. His other premises are in Harlesden and Burnt Oak; he also has an appeal under way in regard to premises that he wishes to open at 10 Bank buildings, Harlesden.

At the inquiry, the Government and Mr. Reed seemed to be on the same side, as the inspector's report shows. According to paragraph 5, on behalf of Mr. Reed,

"it was contended that a range of complementary services are necessary to support the shopping attractions, and these can positively contribute to the vitality of shopping centres. Such uses include financial and professional services, cafes and restaurants and, increasingly, amusement centres. This view is in accordance with the advice contained in . . . Circular 13/87".

Many of my constituents have still to be persuaded of the benefits that an amusement centre brings: certainly, those benefits cannot be classified in the same category as professional services, cafes and restaurants.

In quite a fair account, the report also gives the views of the council and the residents, who were in agreement:

"The Council considered that an amusement centre would be disruptive rather than complementary to the shopping centre. This was also the view expressed in most of the letters of representations."

If there is an underlying ideology for the inspector's decision, it appears in paragraph 8, where he states:

"The centre would offer an opportunity for leisure and recreation for shoppers in the same way as a cafe or restaurant, providing a complementary function."

I hope that the inspector will pop along to Willesden high road to see many harassed shoppers pausing to spend a few bob in the local amusement arcade before staggering backwards and forwards with their shopping in an area that is poorly served by public transport and that suffers from the most appalling congestion. Most people simply want to get in and out of the area as rapidly as possible and

complete their purchases. I do not think that many people set out from the Willesden green area to spend a delightful half hour on the machines before flogging their way around Gateway supermarket. Perhaps the inspector does not do his own shopping.

The public's perception is contrary to that rather remarkable view. The reputation of amusement arcades is not such that they are an equivalent addition to the amenities of an area's financial services or restaurants. In many areas—I am not saying that this will inevitably happen with this proposed arcade—amusement arcades lead to a concentration of prostitution, where young people make their bodies available to people who are attracted in the knowledge that that service is freely available. In many arcades, drugs are distributed and they are constantly under surveillance by the police and are a constant source of problems to them. In addition, they tend to act as a magnet for local petty criminals. That is why all the schools in the area object to the arcade. In other areas of the country, the last thing that a local school wants is for an amusement arcade to open in the vicinity.

Uniquely on Brent council, all the political parties agreed. They unanimously rejected the application, as they have rejected several others in the past decade. To get the Conservative party, Liberal Democrats and the Labour party in Brent to agree on anything, other than that they do not like my criticisms of the council, is almost unique.

Such unanimity should count for something. The council's planning officer says that in his recollection the Department of the Environment has not refused an appeal against the council's dismissal of a planning application for an amusement centre in the past 10 years, with the result that six now operate in the borough. Some people would include the town hall and make it seven, but one does not have to pay to get in there.

The position is quite remarkable. The Government created the poll tax to improve local accountability, but they will not let a local authority decide whether a shop should be used as an amusement centre. One wonders what earthly point there is in having a remaining form of local government if it cannot be trusted to make a decision based on its intimate knowledge of the locality. The political unanimity resulted from that local knowledge, which is shared by all members of the local authority.

The Government have rightly made strict rules on the need to consult residents when councils draw up planning policy and district plans. The unitary district plan currently being drawn up by Brent firmly rejects amusement centres in primary shopping areas. Many local people at meetings that I have attended have said, "Why bother? What is the point of trying to mobilise arguments, of persuading the council and of trying to persuade the inspector when the Government decide to override the local authority?"

After discussion, the local residents' group, CETRA, has advanced what it thinks—I share its view—is a much more sensible approach, certainly to relatively small planning applications such as this. The Chapel End Tenants' and Residents' Association said:

"Would it not be possible for appeals to the DOE to be restricted in the same sense as an appeal in a criminal case would be, ie further evidence has to have come to light, or there has to be evidence of 'jury nobbling', or misdirection by the judge . . . planning applicants should not be able to go to appeal just because they don't like the verdict; if they can show that they were prejudiced against in some way, or the Officers withheld vital information from Councillors then that of course would be a different matter. There should also be an appeal system for us as the system is loaded against us at the moment. If Councillors have been 'nobbled' and approve a Planning Application that is contrary to the wishes of the majority of people, we really have no right of redress. In certain cases we may be able to go to the Ombudsman but generally we don't have the same right to have the application heard again in front of an independent third party."

That is a sensible approach when dealing with small and much less controversial planning decisions. I well understand that Secretaries of State find difficulty in calling in vast planning applications involving the South Bank or controversial matters that consume the interest of the nation. As one can see from the absence from the debate of most hon. Members, this issue does not consume the interest of the nation. If it did, the Chamber would be full. It is nonsense that these decisions are considered at this level of government rather than being left to local authorities.

The residents now can object only to the licence being granted on the narrow grounds that the person concerned is unfit to hold such a licence or the premises are unsuitable. Unless the residents operate their own policing system, they will find it difficult to investigate an applicant's suitability.

This brings me to a side issue which I raised in another Adjournment debate—use orders. The residents state:

"Willesden High Road is full of premises with A3 use—every other shop seems to be a restaurant of some sort. Kilburn is now packed with what are ostensibly pubs but by my definition are nightclubs and the trend is working its way down Willesden Lane. We already have one pub in Willesden where no planning permission was needed . . . because it was previously two restaurants."

Two premises may be knocked together and a pub may appear without local residents being able to object. The pub to which I referred has

"now applied for a licence until midnight, 7 days a week. As people are not queueing up to buy shops in the High Road, I"—

CETRA—

"predict that a number of them will become pubs/wine bars within the next year or so."

The Government are still pondering the review of the A3 use group as the system is obviously not working. I hope that it will not be long before the report is published and there are further restrictions.

More pubs, wine bars and amusement arcades will mean the death of what is still a central shopping facility for a local, family community. Willesden high road has been badly affected by the recession over the past few years. One shop after another is closing. Often people purveying alcohol or running amusement arcades seem to be the only ones interested in opening in the face of the recession.

The area has suffered from the general rundown in grants to the local authority. It needs much spent on it to enable it to improve and to attract new jobs, yet traffic remains congested. The contemptuous way in which London Transport has ignored local residents and introduced one-person bus operation means that the street tends to be congested, with buses often causing long delays as people try to get on and the operator issues tickets, answers questions and so on. The area is declining. The last thing it needed was the Government saying, "Here comes the amusement arcade." That is another nail in the coffin and will be seen as such by every local trader. It is an unhelpful sign for a shopping precinct that is struggling to survive in the midst of a grim recession.

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

I conclude by raising an issue that I raised earlier: what is local government's role if we cannot trust local councillors to take such decisions? No one would deny that there must be a system of inspectors hearing appeals to prevent a completely unrepresentative, or even corrupt, clique operating a council's planning system for personal advantage. Generally, one thinks of the fraud squad dealing with such circumstances.

The idea of an inspector overturning local political opinion, the opinion of local residents and of local schools leads one to ask the fair question, would the inspector, Mr. Geoffrey Hill, want an arcade in his street? I strongly suspect that the answer would be, no. I suspect that if he were told that an amusement arcade was to be opened near where he lived, he would be one of the first to object to the local planning committee and to mobilise support against the idea. He would be right to do so because it would damage his area and would probably reduce property prices.

I strongly suspect that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), would not like one next door to his property any more than I would. If we do not want them next door to us or in our local shopping centres, why do we operate a nonsensical system which overrides all local opinion and which means that Big Brother Government decide that people must live with them, whether or not they want to do so? That is not a sensible planning system.

The Government should take on board the quotation that I read from CETRA. They should consider whether they operate the best system for conducting such appeals, a system that can be properly understood only by local people and in which local opinion should be paramount.

11.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on obtaining the opportunity to raise this issue. I am grateful to him for giving me advance notice of the subject.

I listened with great interest to what the hon. Gentleman said about amusement arcades. I know that he examines closely the impact of planning decisions and of planning legislation on his constituency. I also know that there is considerable local opposition to the opening of the proposed amusement premises. Therefore, I am glad to have the opportunity to reassure him about the care taken by the planning inspectorate in deciding planning appeals and to try to explain the position of amusement arcades in relation to town and country planning legislation.

At the outset, I must explain that I have to confine my remarks to the general issues raised by these cases. I cannot discuss a particular decision taken by a particular planning authority or any decision taken on appeal. That restriction is especially relevant to the appeal decision involving No. 60 Willesden High road. Under section 288 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 there is a period of six weeks following an appeal decision during which it is open to any party to challenge that decision in the High Court. In the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred, that six-week period has not yet elapsed. Therefore, I must be careful to avoid any possibility of prejudicing my right hon. Friend's position. Nevertheless, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the right to challenge appeal decisions and thus to subject them to the scrutiny of the courts demonstrates that all such decisions must be taken only after very careful consideration of their planning merits.

The purpose of allowing a disappointed applicant to appeal against the refusal of planning permission is to enable a developer to have a second chance for the planning merits of his proposal to be considered by an independent and impartial person. At one point, I thought that the hon. Gentleman implied that, because appeal decisions might turn out to be different from those originally taken by the local planning authority, no right of appeal should exist. When planning control was introduced after the war, it effectively removed the right of individuals to develop or, indeed, to use land or property that they either owned or rented in the way that they wanted unless they had obtained permission from the local planning authority. Under those circumstances, it seems reasonable that a right of appeal should exist.

Appeal decisions are made only after a very careful evaluation of the planning merits of the cases involved. The inspectors' points of reference—in terms of legislation, Government planning guidance and any relevant provisions of a development plan—are identical to those which would have been considered in the first instance by the local planning authority. The position is the same for appeals against the failure of a planning authority to determine a planning application within the required period. There can be no sense in which appeal decisions are more lenient on the developer than local planning authorities' decisions; the issues to be taken into account are the same, and the record shows that a very substantial proportion of appeal decisions uphold the original decision taken by the local planning authority.

However, I know that there is a particular problem with cases involving amusement arcades in terms of the way they are perceived by third parties and sometimes by local planning authorities. Much opposition to amusement arcades centres on the expectation that they will attract noisy and unruly adolescents and, in some cases, act as a meeting place for young people, encouraging anti-social or even criminal activity, as the hon. Member for Brent, East suggested. Those who oppose amusement arcades from that point of view find it difficult to accept a decision to grant planning permission that seems to have taken little note of their concerns about the likely clientele of the arcade. The difficulty of accepting a decision to grant permission may be greater where that decision is made by an inspector following an earlier decision, taken at a local level, to turn down the application. I shall refer to the expectation that an amusement arcade will attract disreputable and disruptive clients as a "moral" concern.

I have to make it clear that such a moral concern, whether or not it is well founded, is not a land use planning consideration, and, as such, should not be taken into account in the decision whether to grant planning permission. All planning decisions should reflect the judgment of the courts that planning controls should not be used to prevent lawful forms of development on the ground that they are felt to be socially or morally undesirable. That point is reflected in my Department's development control policy note 11 "Service uses in shopping areas". Planning inspectors, therefore, cannot

uphold local authorities' decisions that they believe to have been based on local opposition rooted in prejudice against an amusement arcade per se.

A local planning authority determining a planning application for an amusement arcade should consider what aspects of the proposal need to be subject to planning control. Development control policy note 11 identifies several typical planning considerations. They include the creation of unacceptable noise and disturbance. An arcade should not be allowed in a residential area or near schools or hospitals if it can be shown that the noise that it would create would be obtrusive. That deals with the hon. Gentleman's question about objections that an individual —for example, the hon. Gentleman, a planning inspector or me— might have to an amusement arcade near his home. Our objections might be well founded if it was proposed to site the arcade in a residential area where it would create an obtrusive degree of noise. Appearance is another relevant issue, especially in conservation areas. The kind of amusement proposed can also be relevant: if it is of a sessional nature, traffic and parking issues can be involved.

All those points may be "material considerations" to be taken into account in any planning decision about an amusement arcade. However, every planning decision must have regard to the provisions of the local development plan. Relevant policies in an up-to-date development plan carry considerable weight in development control decisions, and the Government have repeatedly made it clear over the past few months, during the passage of the Planning and Compensation Bill through the House, that we wish to move to a more plan-led system, which will give greater coherence and predictability to planning decisions.

We have emphasised the importance of development plans in the whole decision-making process. We have stated that, where there are clear, up-to-date policies in development plans, which are consistent with national and regional policies and relevant to the proposals under consideration, they will carry considerable weight with the Secretary of State and his inspectors in dealing with planning appeals. In effect, the development plan will be the starting point for deciding planning applications and will provide the framework for local decision making in a greater proportion of cases in the future. In the longer term, we hope that comprehensive coverage of the country by up-to-date local plans will help to reduce the number of appeals. The overall effect will be to enhance the role of the local planning authority.

At present, the London borough of Brent has no specific local plan policy on amusement arcades. I have had the opportunity of discussing with the hon. Gentleman—on another occasion and in a slightly different context—the role that will be played in future by unitary development plans, and I believe that he shares my hope that the borough's emerging unitary development plan will contain clear and soundly based policies that address issues of local concern, which may include the intensity of the large number of amusement arcades in Brent.

None of what I have said about the scope of planning control over amusement arcades should be construed as diminishing the importance of what I have identified as the "moral" concerns about amusement arcades. This is not the context in which to consider the effects of such arcades on young people. However, I stress that it is because of concern about the possible "moral" or social implications of amusement arcades that the granting of planning permission is not in itself enough to allow an amusement arcade to become established. Under the Gaming Acts, amusement arcades that offer prizes require permits. Local authorities concerned at the spread of such premises in their areas therefore have a means of control, even when planning permission has already been granted. I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary keeps a very careful watch on the effectiveness of this legislation and on the whole question of the social consequences of amusement arcades.

Under the Gaming Act 1968, premises with amusement-with-prizes machines require a permit and considerations that may be irrelevant to a planning application or planning appeal may nevertheless be valid factors for a local authority to take into account when deciding an application for a permit. Although there is not a great deal of case law, I am advised that among the grounds that can be used for the refusal of permits either alone or in combination with other grounds are demand —which may already be met by other existing premises in the area; fire safety; the possibility of under-age people entering; and trouble in the locality as a result of the congregation of young people which would encourage truancy and delinquency. Another ground is the possibility that undesirable people might be attracted to the arcade. Social problems may be worse and there may be difficulties for the police. Another consideration may be the suitability or otherwise of the proposed manager.

All those grounds suggest that the power to refuse a permit can be useful for local authorities concerned about the growth of amusement centres in their areas, irrespective of whether planning permission has been granted. Local authorities may make byelaws under section 75 of the Public Health Act 1961 covering such matters as safety, fire precautions, public order and avoidance of nuisance. Byelaws can regulate opening hours and require the manager not knowingly to permit the premises to be the habitual resort or place of meeting of reputed prostitutes. They can also require the manager not knowingly to permit the entry of any person who is drunk or disorderly. The Home Office published and circulated model byelaws to local authorities in October 1989.

I said at the outset that I could not comment on the specific case referred to by the hon. Gentleman. However, I hope that my general remarks have shed some light on the principles involved in relation to the particular problem that has arisen in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 2 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL

Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.
Read the Third time, and passed.

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time tomorrow.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 4 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Defence Industry

1. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the future prospects of the British defence industry; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend promote the best interests of all sectors of the British defence industry, including those of missile manufacturing? Does he agree that defence jobs are more secure with the policies of this Government than with those of the Labour party?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is entirely right. From my own conversations with management and work forces, I can confirm that the defence industry knows well what its prospects would be if Labour ever got its hands on the defence budget.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Minister realise the damage that is being done through uncertainty, speculation and rumour as a result of the Government's continued inability to make a decision on the EH101? Will he say today when that decision will be made? I plead with him, for goodness sake say something, because the uncertainty now risks killing jobs, undermining orders, threatening European co-operation and delaying Westland providing a piece of equipment that the Navy desperately needs to do its job.

Mr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman, for constituency reasons, chooses to depict that problem in lurid colours. In doing so, he is being somewhat irresponsible because he knows that this is a highly important procurement decision in which a number of factors must be weighed carefully. As the right hon. Gentleman also knows, we are appointing a prime contractor. In the fullness of time, the results of the tender will be made known. It is not for me to accelerate that process, because all the data must be weighed carefully and I do not want to cut any corners.

Mr. Burns: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the English Electric Valve company in my constituency is a world leader in the manufacture of third-generation image intensifiers? Does he agree that there is something inherently unfair in the fact that, although American companies can tender or compete for supplying the British armed forces with equipment, the EEV cannot compete in the American market to supply the Americans with image intensifiers because the American Government have stressed that non-American companies cannot take part in the tendering process? I should be extremely grateful if my right hon. Friend could look into the matter and try to persuade the American Government to have a more realistic and fair tendering policy.

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend draws attention to an extremely important point. He says that the American Government "have stressed" that that cannot happen, but there is no hard and fast rule. From time to time, cases of United States arms procurement protectionism occur and I am always glad to have them drawn to my attention. I shall do my best to raise them in the appropriate quarters in Washington, if my hon. Friend will give me fuller details as soon as possible.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Is the Minister aware that, in contradistinction to the offensive remarks about the Opposition that were made by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), 1 million skilled workers are engaged in defence work and that, although they understand the need to restructure the forces and for the "Options for Change" exercise, their trade union leaders are concerned that the outcome will bite deep into the core of our high-tech industries? What, then, of our future design teams and professional and highly skilled workers?

Mr. Clark: Defence spending is set to decline by only 6 per cent. over the next three years. That is no more serious an impact than that which many specialised industries suffer in a time of recession. Equally, I would not want to deny the validity of much that the hon. Gentleman says, because he has deep and sympathetic experience in this area. My hope and belief is that redundancies in highly skilled sectors will rapidly be absorbed in the civilian sector, particularly as the recession turns round and we move back to greater prosperity.

Mr. Latham: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when redundancies are about to be announced at Ministry of Defence workplaces, hon. Members are informed of them in advance? Is he aware that I have received letters from trade unions at 35 Base Workshop, Old Dalby, in my

constituency, saying that they were told about redundancies, yet the constituency hon. Member was not aware of them?

Mr. Clark: This is the first that I have heard of that. Had my hon. Friend written to me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State we would have tried to deal with the matter circumspectly. In so far as any discourtesy has been suffered or felt by my hon. Friend, I apologise to him.

Mr. Rogers: In the past two years I have asked the Secretary of State about the Government's defence sales to Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Even in yesterday's debate on the Army, Ministers denied selling arms and defence materials to Iraq. Now that we can prove—the circumstances are outlined in the *Financial Times* today—that International Military Services Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary responsible directly to the Secretary of State, has been selling arms to the Iraqis, will the Minister make a statement and apologise for misleading the House?

Mr. Clark: The House does not like Members to read from prepared matter at Question Time, but I hope that I shall be forgiven for doing so on this occasion. IMS was given a licence by the Ministry of Defence to market the design in 1979. A contract was signed in 1981 for the design and supervision of the construction, supply and installation of safety and monitoring equipment. The contract was completed in 1987, as there was a two-year delay in letting the construction contracts, which went to a South Korean firm. Originally, the facility was due to be finished in 1984, and the safety and monitoring equipment was shipped in 1983. All necessary Government approvals were obtained prior to IMS signing the contract in 1981.

Rapid Reaction Force

2. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made towards establishing a European rapid reaction force.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): Western European Union Ministers met in Luxembourg on 27 June. Copies of the communiqué issued after their discussions have been placed in the Library of the House. The Ministers agreed to put work in hand on a future operational role for the WEU. The United Kingdom intends to make a positive contribution to all aspects of the work. One possibility would be the establishment of a European rapid reaction force.

Mr. Taylor: With the effective ending of the Warsaw pact by the signing of the protocol in Prague yesterday, and with the grave events in the Balkans which threaten the security of the rest of Europe, it is natural that attention should be moving to the idea of a European rapid reaction force. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the justifiable interest of the European Community in stretching the discussion of security to defence would be best protected if the European rapid reaction force were based within the Western European Union, thereby providing a bridge and keeping the command structure under NATO?

Mr. King: We believe that the prime defence of Europe lies in the NATO alliance to which our forces are assigned. We see that there could be circumstances outside the NATO area where there could be value in European co-operation and where our forces—not separate but separable from NATO—could, perhaps in combination with other European countries, have a part to play in certain circumstances, and we are discussing that aspect in the WEU.

Mr. Dalyell: Would it be part of the task of a rapid reaction force to search out Iraqi nuclear facilities at Tuwaitha, Abu-Gharaib or wheresoever the Iraqis have taken nuclear facilities in Iraq? If so, would part of its task also be to try to monitor what has happened? Is it not incredible that we make such a fuss about carefully stored nuclear waste, but that no one has monitored the nuclear situation in Iraq after the bombing?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman is well aware of resolution 687. There seems to be clear evidence that Saddam Hussein is already in breach of it, because it requires him to disclose full information about his nuclear materials. We have made it absolutely clear that we intend to implement resolution 687, which involves urgent on-site inspection and the destruction, removal or rendering harmless, as appropriate, of all the items concerned.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the rapid reaction corps concept, readiness is crucial and that any idea that parts of units committed to it, such as that of the 4th squadron in each tank regiment should be mothballed, would be fatal to the whole design? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that there would be considerable disquiet on both sides of the Chamber if cuts in generals, admirals and civil servants were prevented while cuts in our frontline forces went through?

Mr. King: On the first point, I have already made the distinction between separable and separate forces. I agree that one would not allocate one squadron in a regiment to the European rapid reaction force while the other remained in NATO. The concept of the European rapid reaction force is comparable to what happened in the Gulf. We transferred to the Gulf forces assigned to NATO, such as the 1st British Armoured Division. I see no concept of having separate forces or different bits of separate regiments. If my hon. Friend will watch this space, he will hear very shortly about our proposals for streamlining the Ministry of Defence, which will meet precisely the objectives that he has in mind.

Dr. Reid: Does the Secretary of State agree that it is fitting and proper that the rapid reaction force should be placed under British command? Is it not a testimony to the expertise of our troops and the esteem in which they are held by our allies? If the rapid reaction force points to the future need for highly flexible and mobile troops, will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to dispel newspaper reports which have spoken of the emasculation of the Parachute Regiment by the closure of its headquarters, one battalion and all the reserve battalions?

Mr. King: In the debate on the Army yesterday, my right hon. Friend made it clear that we would not comment on any regiments until I make a statement, which I hope to do before the House rises. I have already made it clear that I hope to publish the White Paper on defence estimates early next week. I hope to make a statement on the details of the Army restructuring before the summer recess.

HMS Endurance

3. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of HMS Endurance.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): HMS Endurance has entered her routine maintenance period on return from the Antarctic. She will have an extensive structural survey during her maintenance period. A decision on deployment this winter will depend on the results of that survey.

Mr. Gill: As one of several Members of this House who has had the pleasure and privilege of visiting the Falkland islands, may I say that any decision not to maintain or replace that vessel will send shock waves through the islands' population? Will my right hon. Friend, in his future deliberations on that subject, further consider the much heightened awareness of people in this country about developments in the south Atlantic generally and their interest in having the Antarctic region maintained in pristine condition?

Mr. Hamilton: I completely accept that at present the Endurance has a much wider responsibility than merely for the Falkland islands. As for the shockwaves, Falkland islanders are greatly reassured about their future defence interests by the massive investment that we have made in Mount Pleasant airport and by the ability that we have to reinforce at very short notice.

Mr. William Ross: Although it is well recognised that the other vessels in the south Atlantic have a defence capacity far in excess of anything that Endurance might be able to provide, is it not a fact that the Royal Navy has to carry out quite a lot of scientific work and that that work can be done only by an ice-strengthened ship? Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us not only that Endurance will be kept in service for some years to come, but that when it finally has to be withdrawn from service there will be a suitable replacement vessel both to carry out the scientific work and to offer a public demonstration that we will maintain the defence of the Falkland islands by keeping a vessel down there permanently?

Mr. Hamilton: I can give the hon. Gentleman the guarantee that he needs: we shall continue to defend the Falkland islands—our investment there is great. I accept that HMS Endurance has a certain value to the Royal Navy, but I am afraid that we shall have to wait and see how things pan out. The future of Endurance depends a great deal on the survey work being done on her at the moment.

Mr. Wilkinson: Why is my right hon. and gallant Friend so coy about this matter? That is not a role that usually befits him and it is most uncharacteristic of him. Would it not be much better if the Government and the Ministry of Defence recognised that we had a long-term strategic interest in Antarctica and the Falkland island dependencies and that the balance of power round the Horn depends on our presence there?

Mr. Hamilton: I am trying to be as forthcoming as I can. The fact remains that a survey is being carried out on the ship and we shall have to wait for its results before we can say with any clarity what the ship's future will be.

RAF St. Athan

4. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will consider making enhanced payment to civilian employees at RAF St. Athan to prevent them from being recruited by competing employers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): The existing civil service pay system provides sufficient flexibility to enable pay rates to be adjusted to overcome local recruitment and retention problems. There is no evidence that any such adjustment is necessary at present in respect of the civilian employees at RAF St. Athan, and I cannot speculate about what may happen in the future.

Mr. Smith: I thank the Minister for that reply. As yet, there is not a problem at RAF St. Athan, but, given the pay differentials of up to 25 per cent. between the Ministry of Defence and civil aviation companies, there is a danger that when British Airways builds its unit at Cardiff-Wales airport there could be mass poaching of skilled precision engineers from RAF St. Athan. That will have serious defence implications. I hope, therefore, that the money is available should the air officer commanding maintenance unit call for special payments.

Mr. Carlisle: To make enhanced payments there must be clear evidence that existing rates are failing to attract adequate staff. There are no significant staff shortages at present and we have no problems with recruitment. Should the situation take a turn for the worse, however, we shall take the necessary action to maintain proper employment at St Athan.

Kurdish Refugees

5. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the assistance given by his Department to Kurdish refugees.

Mr. Tom King: The initial deployment of RAF Hercules and Chinooks played a major part in getting vital supplies to the refugees in their desperate plight. That assistance was then backed up by 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, who helped ensure the safe return of refugees from the mountains. Throughout, they have worked closely with the other coalition forces and the aid agencies in this remarkable achievement. There are at present about 1,200 United Kingdom personnel in northern Iraq and nearby in Turkey, providing reassurance to the Kurds. We are consulting our allies on a suitable security presence in the area to underline our continuing interest in preventing a recurrence of the previous persecution.

Mr. Barnes: The Kurds of Iraq feel that they are being left unprotected. British troops may pull out too early. What is to be done about assisting the United Nations to pick up the role that allied troops have been playing, so that the United Nations can deploy the necessary forces and resources? Will the British Government see that the United Nations is helped in that way?

Mr. King: Many of the Kurds who have expressed such concern are alive only because of the action that saved the lives of hundreds of thousands. To my personal knowledge and from observation, those people would be dead if

Operation Haven had not been launched. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the answer in which I said that we would consult our allies about a suitable security presence in the area. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also spelt out our criteria, which we expect to see established.

Sir Alan Glyn: Is my right hon. Friend prepared to allow troops to remain there until the United Nations has a force that is capable of guarding the secure areas where Kurdish refugees are staying?

Mr. King: We certainly look for a significant presence by the United Nations, but we would not rely on that alone. We are considering in what ways we can back that with a security presence in the area and effective warnings to Iraq that any renewed repression would meet the severest response. We want to see a continuing deterrent military presence in the region to back those warnings, and the maintenance of sanctions against Iraq. That is the strategy which was spelt out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and it has wide support among our allies.

Mr. [illegible] Brown: As Turkey wishes to join the European Community, will the Secretary of State, when he next meets his counterparts in Turkey, advise the Turkish Government that it would be helpful if the Kurds in Turkey were not persecuted, as they are at the moment?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that all the relief efforts, which have resulted in the saving of hundreds of thousands of lives, owe a great deal to the support and help that we have had from the Turkish Government in connection with our bases. It would not have been possible to mount the rescue operation without the active support of the Turkish Government, to whom I pay tribute. That co-operation was given at a time when Turkish policemen and others were being shot by Kurdish terrorists.

Directorate General of Quality Assurance

6. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the directorate general of quality assurance.

18. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the directorate general of quality assurance and the outcome of the study into relocating this to Portland.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We are continuing to examine, in the context of "Options for Change", exactly what technical services currently provided by the directorate general of defence quality assurance will be needed in future and how they might best be supplied.

Mr. Devlin: Is my hon. Friend aware that the indecision in his Department since November has resulted in one of the five flagship sites on Teesside effectively being blighted? I urge my hon. Friend to bring his review forward as quickly as possible so that we can get on with an alternative development if necessary or with the development of the facility if he decides to send it to us.

Mr. Carlisle: I recognise that my hon. Friend is anxious for a decision. So am I. However, substantial sums of public money are at stake and it would be wrong to announce a decision until we have thoroughly concluded our studies.

Mr. Bruce: I wonder whether the Ministry of Defence has got this quite right, because surely no other buyer would seek to put its quality assurance in a building that was separate from its other functions. Surely it would be far more sensible to locate geographically close to suppliers, users and research facilities—in Portland for instance.

Mr. Carlisle: There is a considerable overlap between our research establishments in the technologies of quality assurance. A very good centre is in Portland in my hon. Friend's constituency. As I have said, in view of the high expenditure that is envisaged for any move, we must finish our studies properly before reaching a decision on the future of DGDQA.

Mr. Frank Cook: We are well aware that considerable sums of public money are involved in the decision. A letter from the National Audit Office to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) dated 19 June categorically states:

"A core project can be accommodated within the available finance."

That is some sort of reassurance. Will the Minister guarantee that a decision will take account of the numerous youngsters who have been taken on for training as a result of the original decision to take this to Teesside? Will he also take account of the numerous instances of other Government relocations that have been directed away from Cleveland on the strength of 1,500 jobs that were to go there in the first place?

Mr. Carlisle: Of course we shall take various circumstances into account, but under "Options for Change" our aim has to be to reduce the support areas within the Ministry of Defence in line with the armed services. This means that we have to look carefully at our plans to ensure that they are truly justified in the new circumstances.

Mr. Cartwright: Will the Minister spare a thought for the quality assurance staff at Woolwich, who have been operating under a cloud of continuing uncertainty for 15 years? How does he expect them to do a good job when they still do not know where they and their families will end up? Is not it time that the Government took a decision on this and, having taken it, stuck to it?

Mr. Carlisle: I am aware of the need to come to a decision on this important issue as soon as we can.

Regimental System

7. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what implications his "Options for Change" review will have for the regimental system.

Mr. Tom King: Even though numbers will reduce under "Options for Change", the Government have made it clear that they believe in, and will maintain, the regimental system.

Mr. Cran: My right hon. Friend has, rightly, not ruled out the possibility that some regiments and battalions may have to be disbanded. Does he agree that the criteria for that purpose should be not whether the battalion or

regiment has an illustrious past or a name but rather how well it has recruited and retained its members? Will he consider the possibility that, if some battalions and regiments have to be disbanded, they could be transferred to the Territorial Army and the name retained for other use?

Mr. King: That possibility has been considered. The Army is pursuing this matter in consultations and I am sure that that is the right way to go about it. One of the most objectionable remarks made in the debate yesterday was that I should have intervened and decided, without consulting the Army or giving it the opportunity to determine this difficult change for itself. In the end, I have to take the responsibility and I shall have to stand at the Dispatch Box and justify the decisions reached. Therefore, it is far better for me to invite the Army to see whether it can arrive at the most satisfactory solution for the Army.

Mr. Martlew: Ministerial guidelines say that the criteria used for the reduction in the infantry should take into consideration previous amalgamations and the geographical area for recruitment. Is the Minister aware that there will be great anger in Carlisle and throughout Cumbria if there is a move to disband the King's Own Royal Border Regiment? Will he give a guarantee that he will look carefully at keeping the county regiments, because there will be even greater anger if the two Yorkshire regiments of the King's Division are left unchanged?

Mr. King: I have no doubt that there will be great anger in the hon. Gentleman's constituency about possible changes to regiments. I wonder how much anger there would be if he or any of his constituents knew that his Front-Bench spokesmen have said that they see no further relevance in the regimental system.

Mr. Boscawen: When my right hon. Friend exercises his responsibility in making decisions on the future of the regimental system, will he bear in mind the fact that a central part of that system is the training of recruits and refresher training of non-commissioned officers and officers? The system that has been built up over many years is excellent, so will my right hon. Friend not discard it easily or lightly?

Mr. King: I give my hon. Friend the absolute undertaking, which I know is shared by the Army board and those involved in the exercise, that none of those decisions will be taken easily or lightly. These are serious issues. Almost all right hon. and hon. Members recognise that changes have to come, but they raise difficult issues which we shall consider seriously.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Secretary of State will have had the opportunity to consider at leisure the speeches made in the debate yesterday, including, I hope, the most telling contribution from his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger). Does the Secretary of State realise that he could remove a great deal of the anxiety that is felt about possible changes to regiments if he were to make it clear now that the ability to recruit and to retain will be regarded as the primary factors in determining whether regiments continue?

Mr. King: I am grateful for the thoughtful and constructive contribution from my predecessor in this office. He said, fairly, that when the Army board puts forward its proposals and I announce to the House whatever decisions are taken upon them, we must make clear the basis and the reasons for those proposals. The decisions will not be easy. There is great concern for the loyalty and all the other features of the regimental system that we cherish which will be at stake. However, I fully accept the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger).

Mr. Hague: Given the importance of the ability to attract and retain good recruits, even though my right hon. Friend cannot comment, will he note that, with the sole exception of the Gurkhas, the Green Howards is the best-recruited regiment in the British Army and the last locally recruited regiment in the north-east and that its amalgamation or disbandment would be a serious blow to the recruiting ability of the Army?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend is joining others in giving a positive demonstration of why we believe, unlike Opposition Members, that there is much in the regimental system that is worth preserving and that we intend to keep.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Yesterday the nation recalled the battle of the Somme some 75 years ago. The event was particularly commemorated throughout Northern Ireland because of the sacrifices of Ulster people and southern Irish people, both Roman Catholics and Protestants. Will the Secretary of State ensure that those great traditions are retained by maintaining the Royal Irish Rangers?

Mr. King: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say earlier that I shall not comment on individual regiments, but I understand why he raises that point. As he will know, I have personal experience of the excellent work and traditions of that regiment.

Mr. Couchman: My right hon. Friend is entirely right to stress the importance of consultation with the Army and taking the onus for the difficult decisions on the Army; but at the end of the day, political decisions will have to be made and when he as Secretary of State makes those decisions, will he bear it in mind that the large regiments, particularly the Queen's and the Anglian regiments, are the result of amalgamations in past years and that they must remain as viable regiments in the future?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend puts well one of the concerns that I know are felt by many regiments that have already faced amalgamation, lost their traditional names and gone forward to establish a considerable esprit de corps and reputation of their own. I understand that point very well.

Explosive Handling Jetty

8. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *456*, if he is in a position to outline the steps he proposes to take in order to deal with the delays in the explosive handling jetty construction programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Gentleman on 21 May—that the explosives handling jetty construction programme has been subject to some delay and we are currently examining what further steps are necessary in order to maintain the programme.

Dr. Godman: It is more than three years since I first criticised the consultants, Rendel, Palmer and Tritton, for their unwise recommendation concerning the use of concrete instead of steel for the construction of the jetty. Is not it the case that because of the use of concrete the cost of the jetty has risen from £98 million to £141 million and it will not now be completed until 1993-94? Is not that nothing short of a scandal?

Mr. Hamilton: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's continuing interest in the project. It is true that the whole apparatus will have to be strengthened more than was originally envisaged; however, I do not know that that can be blamed on the use of concrete rather than steel. We are now taking all possible measures to rectify the problems and to ensure that the entire explosives jetty comes on stream in time for our Trident boats.

Mr. McFall: Has not the project almost careered out of control because of the 56 design changes that have been made? I have been contacted by contractors in my constituency who are owed millions of pounds, while at the same time they are being chased by the Treasury and others for VAT payments. Will the Minister give an undertaking that he will contact other Departments to ensure that that stops? More important, will he investigate what I said in last Thursday's Royal Navy debate about sub-contractors, so that their affairs can then be put in order?

Mr. Hamilton: The project has certainly not "careered out of control". As the hon. Gentleman says, changes have been made in the design contract; as I said, we are now trying to rectify the position. If sub-contractors have individual problems relating to payment, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would write to me. We can then investigate them.

Ships and Submarines

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current number of ships and submarines in service with the Royal Navy.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Royal Navy currently has three aircraft carriers, an escort fleet of around 50 destroyers and frigates which is being reduced to around 40, two assault ships and other specialist amphibious shipping, and a substantial flotilla of smaller warships. In addition to the four Polaris boats, we currently have 14 nuclear-powered submarines and seven diesel electric submarines.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Minister accept that we are witnessing a continued decline in the number of naval vessels? Can he tell us how many naval bases we shall require and whether Rosyth will continue to be among their number?

As for submarines, will the Minister tell his hon. Friends and some Opposition Members who signed the sixth report of the Select Committee on Defence, that no one in Scotland wants a nuclear submarine, decommissioned or otherwise, as a museum piece? If they want it, why do they not stick it in the Thames?

Mr. Carlisle: The House should be reminded that, in 1989 and 1990, the Labour party conference voted to cut British defence spending by £9 billion a year, or over a third of the current defence budget. The brutal truth is that that would lead not to tenders for the order for three frigates—which we have just achieved—but to the destruction of most of the Navy and of hundreds of thousands of jobs in naval bases, industry and elsewhere.

Mr. Trotter: Does my hon. Friend accept that there will be a continuing need for first-line technology in the Royal Navy and that that will require an ongoing building programme? Does he take on board the fact that it is essential for the shipbuilding industry to have some idea of the number of ships likely to be ordered over the next five to 10 years?

Mr. Carlisle: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying. I am certain that Swan Hunter will produce an impressive tender for the three new frigates.

Mr.. Boyes: Will the Minister consider the establishment levels required on ships and submarines and, in particular, the deployment of Wrens on submarines, so that the skills for which they have been trained can be fully utilised? Women must have equal opportunities; if they wish to serve on submarines, the necessary arrangements should be made without delay.

Mr. Carlisle: As I said last Thursday, we are studying that possibility.

Dame Janet Fookes: Many of us think that the fleet is already being cut to the bone without any further reductions. How many of the ships that are currently in service can go to sea at present and are not in the process of being refitted or repaired?

Mr. Carlisle: As I said, our policy is to order new ships to replace the older ones and thus to have a more effective Navy. I remind the House that, should Labour's plans ever be implemented, the effect on our equipment and defence budget would be catastrophic.

Private Barry Hemingway

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the death in the Falkland islands of Private Barry Hemingway.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I very much regret the sad death of Private Hemingway, but I am sorry that there is nothing that I can add to what has already been made known to the hon. Gentleman in his correspondence with my Department.

Mr. O'Brien: Following the tragic death of Private Barry Hemingway in a hospital in Montevideo from a virus developed as a result of diving in the Falklands, his family are at a loss because they have asked several questions but the answers are still outstanding. His mother was told on 8 August last year to be ready to fly out to her son, but that failed. She asked for more information and was told that it was not available because the satellite had broken down. People in Germany were made aware of her son's death before she was.

Will the Minister conduct an inquiry into the death of Private Barry Hemingway and will someone call to see the family so that they can be given the information first hand? Can we have answers to the questions that the family has put to me and that I have put to the Minister, but which have not yet been answered?

Mr. Hamilton: I am sorry if some of the hon. Gentleman's questions have not yet been answered. The provision to fly Mrs. Hemingway to see her son was on the basis that he was recovering from the original viral pneumonia that was diagnosed. It was only subsequently that his condition deteriorated and he had a cardio-respiratory arrest, which, tragically, killed him. I shall look again at the correspondence that we have had with the hon. Gentleman and answer any questions that have not yet been answered. Somebody will certainly visit Mrs. Hemingway.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 2 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Ewing: Is the Prime Minister aware that the prospectuses for PowerGen and other privatised industries say that Her Majesty's Government do not expect to use their shareholding to vote on resolutions before the annual general meetings of those companies, but—this is the important point—that they reserve the right to do so? Will the Prime Minister, for once, act decisively, do as he did in the case of the chairmen of the banks and call in the chairmen and chief executives of all the privatised industries and make it clear to them that he will use the power given to him in the prospectus to intervene and stop the obscene salary increases that they are granting to themselves—or is this yet another example of all talk, all dither and no action?

The Prime Minister: I have made clear my view on the large increases on a number of occasions. I have also made it clear that the freedom given in the prospectus is not to be used in that fashion. The hon. Gentleman has been told that before and I reiterate it now.

Mrs. Ree: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to look into the effect on the employment of women of implementing the provisions in the social charter which relate to part-time work? Will not the social charter, which is fully supported by the Labour party, destroy job opportunities for women and restrict the flexibility of part-time work from which so many women benefit?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. We are able to support parts of the social charter, but the draft directions on part-time work would add substantially to the cost to British industry and, in so doing, cost the jobs of many people.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister still certain that, as he promised just two weeks ago, Britain will come out of recession in the second half of this year?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I still believe that we will see the economy move out of recession during the second half of this year. That view is echoed by a number of independent commentators and I see no reason to revise our previous forecasts.

Mr. Kinnock: The engineering employers, steel makers, car manufacturers and retailers are all telling the Government in clear terms that the serious losses of jobs, output and capacity will continue for the rest of this year and even into 1992 and beyond. What evidence does the Prime Minister have to demonstrate that those people, who certainly live in the real world, are wrong?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the latest CBI survey is precisely in line with the Red Book forecasts, which show that the economy will come out of recession in the second half of this year. The right hon. Gentleman will have seen that the G7 Finance Ministers agreed that the world economy was moving out of recession and back into growth. The impact of that will certainly assist our recovery in the second half of this year.

Mr. Kinnock: As for the forecasts of recovery from the world recession, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us which other major industrial country has had a zero-minus-growth rate this year—*[Interruption.]* Under the policies of this Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Interruptions take a lot of time.

Mr. Kinnock: Under the policies of this Government, a zero growth rate would be an improvement.

Can the Prime Minister tell us which other major industrialised country has has a growth rate of minus 2 per cent. this year? What sort of recovery can the right hon. Gentleman look forward to, when every manufacturer in Britain clearly records a loss of capacity and of confidence that have eroded the British manufacturing base for the second time in 10 years?

The Prime Minister: As for the long-term strength of British industry, the right hon. Gentleman should read the recent comment by the director general of the CBI. He said:

"Virtually everything associated with our manufacturing base is better today than it was in the so-called 'golden era'"

to which so many people look back fondly. The director general was right—that was the era of strikes, loss of delivery, lost market shares and Labour.

Sir Ian Lloyd: My right hon. Friend will doubtless have had reported to him the serious news that the Japanese research and development total exceeded £9 billion for the first time last month. Of that sum, £1·5 billion is spent by the five largest semiconductor firms in Japan, exceeding the total research and development expenditure on semiconductors of the United States and western Europe. Had this matter been considered by the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology, which my right hon. Friend chairs? If it has, does that committee share the views of the congressional committee on semiconductor dependency about the serious implications that that has for the defence and the industrial base of the western world?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend rightly makes the point that the huge research and development in the private sector has brought about the remarkable improvement in Japanese productivity in recent years. I shall chair a meeting of ACOST in the near future and I expect that that is one of the matters that we shall discuss.

Q2. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 2 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Prime Minister aware that 16-year-olds on youth training have had their allowance frozen at £29·50 for several years and that, had their allowance risen since 1978 in line with average earnings, it would be £68·60 today? How does the Prime Minister think that those youngsters feel when they again read reports in the press that the heads of newly privatised industries such as PowerGen are awarding themselves pay rises of up to 163 per cent? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that those youngsters are worth so much less than Mr. Wallis?

The Prime Minister: As I said a few moments ago, I have made my opinion on these large increases perfectly clear. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we have a more substantial employment package for young people than this country has ever had and it was added to just a fortnight ago by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

European Single Currency

Q3. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the benefits accruing from a single currency in the European Community to the United Kingdom and other European Community countries either now or in the future.

The Prime Minister: Theoretically, a single currency within a single trading area can save industry the risks and costs of exchange rate transactions. It also saves ordinary travellers cost and inconvenience. Of course, all those advantages apply to a common currency such as that which the United Kingdom has proposed.

But the economic benefits of a single currency can be exaggerated and they carry economic risks with them. If widely divergent economies are forced into the straitjacket of a single currency, the strains in the system may be unsustainable.

Mr. Janman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Was he in the Chamber last week to hear the critical but interesting observation that a federal state bears three distinguishing marks? One of those marks is the existence of a single currency and of a central bank. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the sentiments behind that observation, made by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), fly in the face of the Labour party's policy on Europe?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is clear that the Labour party is split on the question of Europe.

Sir Russell Johnston: If the Prime Minister is saying that he agrees that a single currency is acceptable in principle, is not it also logical that a European central bank should control European-wide interest rates?

The Prime Minister: What I have said repeatedly about a single currency is that if it is market driven and if it is required, it is acceptable to us in principle. However, as the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say yesterday, we have maintained our reserve on the prescriptive single currency which is at present before the Community.

Mr. Favell: With my right hon. Friend's successful Luxembourg conference behind him, will he reject any new proposals to interfere with the Government's right to tax, to spend and to fix interest rates, as otherwise the non-imposition of a single currency could be but a hollow victory?

The Prime Minister: We are still at the very early stage of negotiations on economic and monetary union. I have already made it clear that I am as jealous as any other hon. Member of the rights of the House.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Prime Minister aware that last Friday I asked the Financial Secretary to the Treasury what studies had been made into the benefits for the United Kingdom of economic and monetary union? He answered by referring in column *541* to a written answer that he had given to me on 7 December at column *216*. Both answers showed that no study had been made of the benefits. As the First Lord of the Treasury, will the Prime Minister tell us why that is so?

The Prime Minister: I set out in my original answer to my hon. Friend a few moments ago what the theoretical advantages of a single currency would be. The hon. Gentleman may care to read that answer.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 2 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hayward: Will my right hon. Friend take time to consider the impact on income tax of a massive increase in public spending? Will he in particular say whether he has received any detailed written response to the analysis of the Labour party's programme which was issued by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about a fortnight ago?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes a telling point. I can confirm that I have received no such written response. The Opposition are remarkably coy about their spending plans. These days they set great store by the *Financial Times*, but, as that newspaper said recently:

"Any Labour Government would face clear choices: either unsustainable borrowing, or significantly higher taxation, or a great many disappointed hopes for higher public spending"—

or, of course, all three.

Q5. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 2 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Eadie: In view of the Government-inspired vendetta against the miners and their union, which is now in disrepute, will the right hon. Gentleman give us an assurance that we are not on the verge of another scandal? As the Government have authorised Rothschild bank, Touche Ross and Geoffrey Chancer to advise the Government on the privatisation of the coal industry, will the Prime Minister give us an assurance today that the £6·5 billion miners pension fund will not be used as bait to sell off our coal industry?

The Prime Minister: There is no vendetta against the miners. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to Question Time a few days ago, he would have heard of the number of miners in Nottinghamshire, for example, who now earn well over £20,000 a year, so little is the vendetta of the Government.

Q6. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 2 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Field: May I refer my right hon. Friend to my ten-minute Bill on 29 June 1988, at column 399 of the *Official Report*, when I proposed financial penalties on parents of perpetual truants? In the process of introducing the Bill, I referred to the 1985 Home Office report on parental supervision and delinquency. Has not the case been proved that if parents are careless of the whereabouts of their children, the children are more likely to offend? Is not it high time that we tightened up the rules on truancy? As my old friend, ex-prison governor and Isle of Wight broadcaster C. A. Joyce used to say, "I never met a criminal from a loving and caring home."

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is vital that parents fulfil their duty to secure their children's education. As my hon. Friend will know, under the provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill, the maximum fine for the parents of truants will rise to £1,000. We are very concerned to bring an end to truancy and, through that and other policies, we will seek to do so.

Asylum

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will be making a similar statement in another place.

The number of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom has risen sharply, from 5,000 a year in 1988 to more than 30,000 in 1990. From January to May this year, 21,000 applications were received—a rate of nearly 1,000 a week. In the light of that increase, the Government have been examining asylum arrangements, and I would like to inform the House of our initial decisions.

Britain has a long tradition of providing refuge for people who face imprisonment, torture or death because of their beliefs or ethnic origin. But for hundreds of millions of people who live in disordered countries or under totalitarian Governments the answer to their problem does not and cannot lie in emigration to the west.

Last year, about 500,000 people applied for asylum in Europe. Numbers of this kind cannot be sustained year after year and go far beyond what was envisaged when the present international arrangements were established.

Fear of persecution is no longer the dominant element for many asylum seekers. In only a small minority of cases in the United Kingdom are the applicants shown to have a "well-founded fear of persecution", as required by the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees. The convention is an instrument of last resort, designed to protect life and liberty from immediate threat. It does not confer an unfettered right to travel the world and settle in the country of one's choice. It does not oblige parties to facilitate, still less to encourage, the arrival of asylum applicants. We cannot allow immigration control to become optional, nor must we let the institution of asylum to be undermined by abuse.

Across Europe, Governments are having to review their procedures and to provide additional resources to cope with the unprecedented weight of numbers. I am, of course, discussing the problem with our EC partners. In the United Kingdom, we have decided to take the following action.

First, we want to make it absolutely clear that the United Kingdom is not normally prepared to entertain claims from individuals who have failed to claim asylum in the first safe country that they reached. If individuals arrive here who could have safely claimed asylum elsewhere on their way to the United Kingdom, they will be sent back to that country for the claim to be dealt with there. The only exception is where the applicant has such close links with the United Kingdom that his or her claim should be considered here. In particular, applicants who arrive from other European Community countries should claim asylum there. The asylum convention that we signed in Dublin last year deals with these matters. We shall strengthen procedures at seaports and airports, particularly at Dover, to identify such applicants.

Secondly, the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, through charges on airlines, discourages the acceptance of passengers who do not have valid travel documents. I recognise that many carriers have tried to comply with this, but other carriers are simply not doing enough. I am therefore laying before the House today an order doubling from £1,000 to £2,000 the charge payable by the carrier for each passenger who fails to produce valid documents. We shall increase our programme of training for airlines' staff to implement that Act.

Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I are exploring, with the co-operation of host Governments and airlines, other ways to improve document checks at certain overseas airports. We are willing to provide document specialists to advise carriers about the authenticity of travel documents, perhaps taking photocopies of travel documents for later verification. The police will continue to seek out corrupt agents who are operating in or through the United Kingdom, some of whom have already been prosecuted and convicted.

Fourthly, I am particularly concerned that asylum seekers can arrive here with no passport or other means of identification and must be admitted while their claim is considered. Evidence is coming to light that some asylum seekers have made multiple applications for asylum and have claimed social security benefits in a number of different identities. That is not acceptable. We have recently required asylum seekers to provide photographs of themselves. I am considering the contribution that fingerprinting might make in such cases. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security and I are examining how the opportunities for such fraud can be reduced. I will consider whether any further powers are needed.

Fifthly, the present system for handling refugee applications is excessively cumbersome. The system is now completely overloaded. There are 50,000 undecided cases and the backlog is growing at more than 3,000 cases a month. The average decision time is already more than 16 months and is getting worse.

On 26 April, I announced proposals to speed up the process. Accelerating the process will bring early justice to the genuine applicant and the speedier removal of many more bogus applicants. We are recruiting up to 500 staff for the immigration department at Croydon so that the initial determination can be made more rapidly.

At the earliest parliamentary opportunity, we shall introduce a Bill to allow a substantial acceleration and simplification of procedures. The present opportunities for delay through repeated representations and litigation will be substantially pruned.

Some asylum seekers already have the right to appeal to the immigration appellate authorities before removal, but some have not. The Bill will make it clear that all those who are turned down in the determination process will be able to appeal while they are in the United Kingdom. In addition, new procedural rules will impose time limits for the submission of material in support of claims. Decisions on cases will take into account such matters as the deliberate destruction of travel documents and entry by deception. We shall also carefully examine the credibility and good faith of applicants who make claims for asylum after they have resided in this country for some time.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will be recruiting extra adjudicators and other support staff to the appellate authorities to ensure that asylum appeals will be heard more quickly.

In order to assist the process of improving and streamlining adjudications, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and I also propose to change the publicly funded arrangements for advice and representation in asylum and immigration cases. At present advice

and assistance but not representation are available to those whose means qualify them under the legal aid green form scheme. We propose that in future advice and assistance, and where necessary representation before the immigrant appellate authority, should instead be provided by the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. We believe that this will enable those who genuinely need it to be given such help more economically and effectively than under the green form scheme. When the necessary arrangements are completed my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will bring forward regulations to effect the change, which will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

In consequence of this, and as a result of the extra work which will flow from the changes that I have announced today, we intend to increase substantially the Home Office grant to the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. I am grateful that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continues also to contribute to the costs of the refugee unit of UKIAS.

Our aim will be to decide all cases within a matter of months from start to finish. But in some cases it will be clear from the outset that the applicant has no claim to our protection. The Bill will provide for accelerated handling of clearly unfounded cases. An adjudicator will be able to dismiss an appeal without an oral hearing upon deciding that there is manifestly no substance to the claim.

I believe that the rapid rejection of a large number of unfounded claims and the early departure of those applicants from this country will play a major part in deterring further abuse of the process and allow us to tackle the dramatic growth in the number of applications.

The Government recognise their obligations to genuine refugees, but they also have an obligation to the British people to control immigration. Those obligations can pull in different directions. Our aim is to arrive at a balance between them which is in line with the realities of the modern world. I believe that the measures that I have announced today represent such a balance.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The Home Secretary began by reminding the House of Britain's long and honourable tradition of providing asylum for genuine refugees. I am sure that the whole House will be determined that our reputation as a refuge for the oppressed should not be destroyed, and that we should not lose the genuine benefits that we have from time to time enjoyed as a result of providing asylum for oppressed minorities.

Much of the Home Secretary's statement concerned the necessity of ensuring that those who apply for asylum as a means of avoiding immigration regulations should not be allowed to enter the country. No sensible person could disagree with that intention—not least because the interests of the ethnic minorities in Britain are damaged by such conduct. However, does the Home Secretary agree that it is equally important to ensure that genuine asylum seekers are not denied entry because of the obsession with keeping out bogus applicants? *[Interruption.]* If any Conservative Members below the Gangway want to argue against the contention that genuine asylum seekers should be allowed into the country, I hope that they will say so as the debate progresses.

The Home Secretary will expect me to agree—and I gladly give my agreement—to his intention to take the strongest possible action against corrupt agents, and also his intention to increase the staff available for dealing with the work, although, clearly, we shall want to see the methods by which the work is to be dealt with, and the intended speedy procedures that the Home Secretary outlined.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke of multiple applications, but in a parliamentary answer we were told that the Government has no idea how many multiple applications had been made. Can the right hon. Gentleman provide evidence to justify even considering the idea of fingerprinting—a proposal which many hon. Members, I hope and believe, on both sides of the House will instinctively find repulsive. For such a proposal even to be considered there would need to be a great deal of evidence of multiple applications, and I repeat that the Home Secretary's most recent answer on the subject was that he did not know how many there are or how many there have been.

If the proper balance between providing illegal entry and allowing necessary asylum is to be achieved, the Home Secretary will wish to answer a number of detailed questions. I shall ask him some of them this afternoon, on the understanding that we shall debate these matters in the not-too-distant future.

I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's decision to extend rights of appeal to all asylum seekers in this country. I also welcome his decision to allow representation before immigration appeals tribunals. But we shall want to look with great care at the proposal that that representation and advice should be provided, not through legal aid or the green card system, but by extending the work of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. Can the Home Secretary tell us his intentions in making that change? Does he believe that by giving UKIAS the responsibility for the work he will be providing extra advice for those who need and deserve it, or is he simply cutting costs in a way that may result in advice of the right sort and advice from properly qualified people not being available?

Will the Home Secretary describe how his fast-track proposals will work in practice? He said that, in some cases, it would be clear at the outset that the applicant had no claim to protection. Will it be the adjudicator alone —a single individual—who will make that decision, and will that decision be subject to any appeal? On the whole subject of applications for asylum, may we be assured that they will be subject to judicial review? In many of the stories dealing with the subject which have recently appeared in newspapers—I suspect, preparing the House for the Home Secretary's statement today—it has been suggested that the law will specifically prevent legal review. May we have the Home Secretary's assurance that that will not be the case?

I know that the Home Secretary is anxious to convince the House that his proposals will in no way be biased by racial prejudice. Of course I accept his assurances on that point, but he will understand that our judgment must be made on the basis of the way in which the regulations work in practice; that is far more important than the Home Secretary's good intentions.

So that we may examine these matters, may we have a general assurance about the procedures by which the changes in all the arrangements governing asylum and immigration are to be made? At the moment, thanks to the European Community, the Home Secretary meets his colleagues at two meetings—in Schengen and Trevi—

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

which are described as private and which are in fact secret. Home Secretaries and Interior Ministers come to collective decisions for the entire Community and present those decisions, one by one, to their national Parliaments. Will the Home Secretary assure us that he will abandon that practice—it has been abandoned in Holland under the force of law—that he will report after his meetings with colleagues, and that he will enable the House to discuss his proposals before he agrees them with colleagues in Europe only to present them to the House on a take-it-or-leave-it basis?

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman has given a less than wholehearted welcome for the proposals but none the less there was some warmth in his remarks, I think. I agree with him that it is most important to ensure that the system operates effectively for genuine asylum seekers.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about multiple applications. There have been some multiple applications and some court cases, and I will provide details of them. The right hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that other countries are also experiencing such applications. In my talks with fellow Ministers in Germany and Holland, I have discovered that both countries have experienced multiple applications. Both use photographs and fingerprinting, and other countries, too, now use those techniques.

Perhaps unintentionally, the right hon. Gentleman cast a slur on UKIAS. [HON. MEMBERS: "No".] I was generous enough to say "unintentionally". The right hon. Gentleman said that perhaps this was a method of reducing the independent and fair advice available to immigrants. That is certainly not the case.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the fast-track procedure. The procedure for the determination of all cases is as follows. First, the decision will be taken by an official of my Department, an official of the immigration department, as it is at the moment. Then there can be an appeal to an adjudicator under the existing system. Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what we would envisage for fast-track cases. Some of them may be obvious. Some applicants from completely safe countries make bids for asylum. We have even had some applications from countries such as America and Canada, and those cases are dealt with very promptly. Other cases are not so obvious, but it may nevertheless be clear that the applications are from a safe country. We propose that, in instances where there is a manifest and clear case, the adjudicator should not allow a normal hearing.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about judicial review. I assure him that we are not removing judicial review. It cannot be removed by an Act of Parliament. Asylum seekers who feel aggrieved may ask for judicial review. Once the appellate system has been set up, there may well be far fewer judicial review cases, but that is not for me to decide. In deciding whether there should be judicial review, the courts may well say, "There is a process of determination and adjudication which we think is sufficient." There would, however, still be the opportunity to ask for judicial review.

On the right hon. Gentleman's question about racial bias, may I make it absolutely clear that there is no element of racism in the proposals? The procedures and measures apply equally to Africa, India, the Indian subcontinent and Asia, just as they apply to eastern Europe, Bulgaria, Romania and Russia. I assure the House that there is no element of racial bias in the proposals.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is an Opposition Supply day, with a heavy demand from hon. Members who wish to speak in both debates and that I have no opportunity to limit speeches I shall allow questions on the statement to continue until 4.20 pm in the knowledge that there will be a debate on it later. I ask hon. Member to ask single questions and not to go into the matter in detail.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Further to his point about Dover, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the immigration staff there will be given further assistance and support? Will he also confirm that the ferry company personnel, who are responsible for exhaustively checking documents but who sometimes find it difficult to know whether a document is valid, will be given full support and guidance from his Department's staff to minimise the potential financial effects on ferry companies which are endeavouring to support the law but which find it difficult to do so when documents are confusing?

Mr. Baker: Yes, I give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. We are prepared to give, and are giving, advice and assistance to ferry companies on this difficult matter, given that documentation can be fraudulent and disposed of easily by being thrown overboard if one wants to appear in the United Kingdom without any documentation.

Dover is an important point of entry, but all the boats arriving at Dover come from safe countries. We shall be giving clearer advice to the immigration officers at Dover and at other ports to ensure that asylum seekers can be returned to a safe country if that is what they come from —with the exception that I outlined in my statement—that is, unless the asylum seeker has a close relative here and it would be better for the asylum claim to be discussed in this country.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I realise that there has been a sharp increase in the number of people claiming asylum in the past two years, but does the Home Secretary acknowledge that during the first 10 years of the Conservative Administration 87 per cent. of those who claimed asylum received it? Does he further acknowledge that that was a high proportion and that it would be surprising if the proportion of those who are genuine asylum seekers is greatly different today?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that he must at least approach this matter with much greater caution than his statement suggested? Does he acknowledge that a civilised country does not seek to balance fundamental rights and freedoms against immigration control, and that the genuineness of asylum applicants must be allowed to come through? Does he further recognise that there will be great concern about a number of his opaque statements today—about the curtailment of opportunities for litigation, about the accelerated decision making for cases that are allegedly manifestly unfounded, and, above all, about his decision to end legal aid?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman lives in an unreal world. At the beginning of the decade, applications for

asylum were running at about 3,000 per year and the hon. Gentleman said that about 87 per cent. were granted asylum—his figures are not quite right—but the fact is that we are now receiving 50,000 applications per year. Is he really saying that the Liberal party would allow 87 per cent. of those? I have been careful to ensure that genuine applications from political refugees should still be considered with great care and scrupulousness.

Throughout our history we have always welcomed people fleeing from persecution, torture and imprisonment, but we are now faced—not simply in this country but in every country in Europe—with a different flow altogether. We are faced with great migratory pressures resulting not from political measures and considerations but principally from economic considerations. I believe that that will be one of the great problems of the 1990s for the whole world.

The hon. Gentleman said that he was worried about the various measures that I have announced today. I have not announced any reduction of access to litigation. He could not have heard my remarks. I pointed out that we have provided the possibility of appeal for those who did not previously have the opportunity of such an appeal and will continue to provide generous assistance for applicants.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, without these measures, a serious social problem would develop in the United Kingdom, just as a serious problem is developing in Italy, Germany, France and other European countries? It is essential for us to have common sense procedures to protect the genuine refugee and to ensure racial harmony in the country as a whole.

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend. If asylum-seeking is used as a means of evading immigration control, with all that that means, social problems can be created. Indeed, the social problems in this area that exist among some of our partners in Europe are much greater than are our problems. Both parties in this country have worked hard at this problem over the last 30 years and put a high premium on racial harmony, fairness and equality in our society. That is paying off. Unfortunately, some European countries that have not given so much attention to the matter are finding that already there is unacceptable violence and tension. I believe that we have behaved responsibly. We must act in this way to ensure that the true refugee can find asylum here and that bogus applicants are sent back to where they came from.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): It is clear that the Government are intent on using the numbers game, both in immigration matters and for refugee and asylum seekers, to create a racist backlash—*[Interruption.]*—because that is going to happen. I accuse the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister of creating a racist backlash by using the numbers game. Is it a coincidence that, at the same time that Jacques Chirac, the Gaullist leader, talks about having an overdose of immigrants, the British Government begin thinking in terms of the numbers game?

Regarding legal representation for asylum seekers, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that UKIAS will be able to cope with the number of refugee representations that it will have, particularly in view of the situation surrounding the Kurdish question?

Mr. Baker: To answer the hon. Gentleman's last point first, we shall be increasing the grant to UKIAS very substantially indeed—my officials are already in discussions with it—and that will involve the recruitment of more staff by UKIAS.

In answering the hon. Gentleman's main point, I utterly reject his claim that this is a racist policy. If he can see no distinction between the number of applicants seeking asylum at the rate of 100 a week and 1,000 a week, with all the tensions and difficulties that that can create, he does not understand the situation and the problem that could arise in this country.

I reaffirm to the hon. Gentleman, because he is listened to in his community, that the policy I have announced today—and I hope that his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) does not agree with his remarks—does not distinguish on grounds of colour or race. It applies to asylum seekers, black or white, from wherever they come.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that providing housing and assistance to asylum seekers is putting a great strain on some London boroughs? Does he intend to seek powers to direct asylum seekers to housing outside Greater London while they are awaiting screening?

Mr. Baker: I do not think that we shall be able to do that. It is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. None the less, I accept the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks. The number of asylum seekers is some 100,000 a week. A stream of dependants may wish to follow, so it may be an understatement of the actual number. They impose considerable strains on housing and other social service requirements. The extent to which the measure will restrain that flow will ease the pressures on local authorities.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): It is my experience that there has been a growth in bogus applications in recent years, which has led to a hardening of the response to genuine applicants for political asylum. I blame the Home Department for the growth in bogus applications because of the increased delay and because the Department deals with corrupt agents whom it does not seek out, arrest and prosecute. I have had cause to bring to the attention of the Home Department three such agents who trade in human misery, rip off enormous sums of money from poor families, mislead them and often tangle up their cases. Will the Home Secretary give a firm assurance that his Department will give much greater priority to arresting and prosecuting the evil people who trade in misery, rather than the poor people who become tangled up with them?

Mr. Baker: I thank the hon. Lady for what she has said and also for the information that she has passed to the Department. We investigate many such cases, but we require evidence. Some prosecutions have been mounted and have proved successful. As the hon. Lady knows, some unscrupulous agents operating in the United Kingdom will provide, for between £1,000 and £5,000, tortuous stories, bogus letters from home and bogus telegrams to try to show that the applicant has a case. In several instances we have found that the cases are totally bogus.

[Mr. Baker]

I assure the hon. Lady that we shall seek out and prosecute those cases. Police investigations are going on at the moment, and I hope that they will be fruitful.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many bogus asylum seekers are coming to Britain as part of a carefully planned racket, which is having a disastrous effect on the confidence of people in this country in the whole system? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), other hon. Members who represent London constituencies are concerned about the housing problems that could flow from that problem. Will my right hon. Friend therefore take that into account in framing the legislation?

Mr. Baker: The whole purpose of my proposals is to abate the flow of asylum seekers. That flow is not unique to our country but is happening throughout Europe, which represents an attractive area for people to live in. Great concern has been expressed by my counterparts, the Ministers of the Interior in Europe, because some of their borders are difficult to police, and whenever there is strife and trouble there is a possibility of more asylum seekers. Alas, some cases of political asylum are well founded because people are fleeing from persecution. But many other people are using asylum as a means of evading immigration control because they would simply prefer to live in Europe.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Having spent June muzzling dogs, the Home Secretary now wishes to spend July muzzling the rights of asylum seekers. Is not the crisis of the Government's own making? Why has the Home Secretary failed to act on the Home Affairs Select Committee's unanimous recommendation that more resources should be made available to the Home Office and Lunar house? Does he not realise that today's announcement of meagre extra resources will do nothing to end the current delay and will cause enormous hardship and misery to those caught up in this immigration mess? If a person is coming on a direct flight from Algiers to London, what is the safest country into which he or she can parachute before arriving in Britain?

Mr. Baker: When the hon. Gentleman reviews his remarks in *Hansard* tomorrow, I believe that he will consider them to be trivial and silly.

We have increased substantially the resources in the Home Office. On 26 April, I announced that we shall recruit 500 more civil servants for the immigration department and that is under way. We have taken additional office accommodation in Croydon, and, as a result of my announcement today, the Lord Chancellor will recruit further adjudicators. He recruited 30 last year and will probably recruit at least 50 or 60 this year because we want to speed up the process. There is no shortage of Government resources—this is extra money. Many safe countries lie between Algiers and this country.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that these proposals in no way reduce or diminish rights to first asylum? Will he therefore agree that, although the proposals reduce the opportunities for fraudulent applications, they also consequently speed up the chances of the genuine asylum seeker?

Mr. Baker: I can certainly confirm that. The proposals in no way weaken the principle of first asylum in the first safe country. It is often easy to determine when there is a genuine case. A decision can be made in a matter of days, and in some cases it is.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Does not the fact that so many people want to come to this country prove that, despite what some folk may say or think, the United Kingdom is still one of the most pleasant and agreeable countries in which to live? That is one reason why the people of Northern Ireland strain every nerve to stay in it.

Does the right hon. Gentleman also agree that since so many nations, not least in eastern Europe, have moved towards democracy and the rule of law there is now great hope that other nations, including even those living under the most vile regimes, will move in the same direction so that the problem will diminish? That being so, does he agree that even genuine refugees should have the right to stay in this country only until their own countries become democratic and abide by the rule of law?

Mr. Baker: Quite a few refugees go back when their countries have calmed down, but many do not because they have become established here, they have jobs here, their children have been brought up here, they have often married here, and they have a right to stay. If they are given refugee status, they can apply for residence after four years and for naturalisation after seven. On the whole, they tend to stay; relatively few go back.

As for changes in totalitarian regimes, the figures for May were encouraging: there were virtually no applications for refugee status from Poland or Czechoslovakia, but there were still applications from Bulgaria and Romania because those regimes are still basically totalitarian and represent a threat to some of their citizens.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am wholly in favour of genuine refugees finding asylum in this country? Is he further aware that I am part English and part Huguenot? The Huguenots made a great contribution to the life of this country. Is he also aware that the people in my constituency, which is near that of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), welcome these arrangements as fair and sensible?

Mr. Baker: I am interested to learn of my hon. Friend's lineage. Clearly he comes from one immigrant refugee family that did not return to France. I very much agree with his sentiments.

The proposals that we have introduced today are a sane and sensible way of dealing with a unique problem which, unless we deal with it, will grow considerably in the next 10 years.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that this negative policy can be justified or excused only if the countries of the developed world ensure that the economies of the underdeveloped world are helped to perform more satisfactorily and are relieved of the immense international debt foisted on them by us?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we direct large amounts of our aid to some of the most troubled countries of the world. For example, the extra

sums that we provided for the Horn of Africa during the past year showed what a troubled state that part of the world is in. A large number of asylum seekers from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia are still applying to enter this country. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to support those economies and try to make them more viable. The prospect of economic development will hold many of these people in those countries. The disparities between the third world and western Europe are likely to remain for a long time. Therefore, the magnetism of Europe will exert a strong pull for a long time.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the timely good sense of his statement. With about 50,000 people and their families waiting to come here, a high proportion of whom are bogus, the statement will have the support of the overwhelming majority of the British people. Despite the criticisms of some Opposition Members, it is clear that, however much we may tighten up the rules and make them more efficient, the British nation remains one of the world's most fair-minded and tolerant countries. The hon. Members for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) and for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) should recognise that fact.

Mr. Baker: Many asylum seekers wish to come here and go through our procedures because they recognise that they will be fairly treated in the process of determination and fairly treated by our courts and our social security system. I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend, but that does not mean that all third-world countries should regard Europe as the answer to their problems. There must be a re-establishment of balance in some parts of the world, otherwise the flow will continue.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I represent a part of London that from the turn of the century has offered a home to genuine refugees, whether they were fleeing from tsarist Russia or, as at the moment, from Somalia.

The Home Secretary has told us how he intends to criminalise people fleeing from war, torture and famine and how he intends to cut across due process. What support does he plan for communities such as those in Hackney which have welcomed genuine refugees and have faced housing and education problems as a result? He is criminalising refugees, but what will he do to help them?

Mr. Baker: Once again the hon. Lady does her cause no good by using extravagant words that make a travesty of the proposals. We already provide a great deal of assistance to refugees through the social security system. Many refugees are also housed, and many people who have been on the housing waiting list for a long time do not rejoice when they learn that a refugee who arrived a week before has been given housing before them.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): My right hon. Friend knows that I have long been urging him to take the sort of measures that he has announced today. I congratulate him on an excellent statement. I urge him completely to ignore the ridiculous, pathetic and, frankly, boring Opposition taunts. Does he agree that some of the people who will be most grateful for his measures are those who are already in this country and greatly resent those who seek to gain entry through what are in effect illegal and deceitful means?

Mr. Baker: This morning I spoke to a white Englishman who told me that he had married into a Pakistani family. He said that his relations in Pakistan greatly resented the extent to which people were abusing refugee status and trying to jump the queue when he was trying to get some of his relations in under our immigration laws. One hears about many such problems.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The right hon. Gentleman has given overall figures, which are certainly large, of the increase in refugee applications in the past three years, but he has given no breakdown of those figures. Does he agree that, particularly in the last year, a substantial number of refugees have fled from appallingly war-torn, civil war and famine-stricken areas such as Somalia, the Sudan and Ethiopia? If that is so, we still face a great problem, but it is wrong for the Home Secretary to give the impression that we are dealing simply with the problem of people who behave criminally and cheat. These people have genuine problems, and they need help.

Mr. Baker: We have a great deal of correspondence on the problems of the right hon. Gentleman's constituency and the large numbers of immigrants there. If the proposition is that the citizens of every country that is poor, underdeveloped or going through a bit of trouble should have a right to move en masse into western Europe, I do not believe that any country, or group of countries, could sustain that.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for a breakdown of the figures. Of the 4,000 who came in May, 500 applications were from eastern Europe and China, 2,500 were from Africa, and 1,000 from the Indian subcontinent and Asia.

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the country will wholeheartedly reject the accusation of the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) that these are racist measures? Does he further accept that British people, of whatever colour, will warmly welcome these proposals as a genuine attempt to strengthen the rights of political asylum, and that political asylum seekers will look forward to hearing more from the Government about attempts to track down those who cynically abuse asylum seekers for their own financial gains?

Mr. Baker: There are many bogus applicants, such as people whose identities change after the examination. For example, one Angolan claimed that he had been tortured and gave all the evidence, but, after six months, said that he came from Zaire and wanted to go back there. Many people in Britain will welcome what I have said today because it is a demonstration of the openness and fairness with which we shall be guided when dealing with this problem.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is the Home Secretary aware that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was in Committee Room 12 this morning, and that he said that so long as war and famine existed there would be those who sought refuge, and that so long as blood-thirsty tyrannies existed there would be those who sought political asylum? Is he aware that the impression given by today's statement—I wonder what prompted him to make it today—is that he is helping

[Mr. Max Madden]

to create a fortress Europe, the door of which will be slammed shut in the face of those seeking refuge from war, famine and political tyranny?

What safeguards will there be to ensure that those seeking political asylum are allowed to register a claim? Will people be able to apply for political asylum after entry, and will applicants in those rare cases in which judicial review is granted be able to remain in the United Kingdom until a decision is reached?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman asked whether people who make applications after they have entered the country will be allowed to remain. Of the 4,000 who applied in May —the pattern is roughly the same for the other months —about one third applied at airports and seaports and two thirds at the immigration offices in Croydon. That is to say, they entered the country as legitimate travellers—visitors, students and business people—and claimed refugee status when the time allowed for their stay had expired. In the adjudication process, there will have to be careful examination of whether the nature of a country has changed in the time that an applicant has been here, or whether he just likes the prospect of an extended stay.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the appeals system that he announced today will apply to all who land in this country and that it fully meets all our international convention obligations?

Mr. Baker: I can give my right hon. Friend an assurance on both points. Until today, about one third of asylum seekers had no access to the appellate system under the immigration procedures. That will now be ended, and everyone will have access. If people apply within the country, the process will be finished within the country, and adjudication will take place and a decision will be reached before they are removed, if the decision is that they should be removed.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Home Secretary aware that, despite what he said, there is bound to be concern among Labour Members that genuine cases could be harmed? We are aware that, for example, the then Tory Government treated those fleeing from Chile in 1973-74 in one way, but when the Labour Government took power they recognised the genuine refugees in a far more meaningful way.

As a former employee, and later chairman, of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, I welcome the increased funding for it. I have every confidence in the organisation. While I recognise, and partly agree with, the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), about legal aid and feel that he was right to make them, I wonder whether the Secretary of State has consulted UKIAS about his announcement. Does it accept that it can take on the increased work load, bearing in mind the obvious difficulties?

Mr. Baker: I make it clear that Ministers do not influence decisions about which countries are safe or which regimes are politically unacceptable. The process of determination is in the hands of officials in my Department and I do not interfere with that. There is also the due process of appeal in the courts of law. Unintentionally the hon. Gentleman may have given the impression that there is some influence.

We are in discussion with UKIAS and I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said. It is a good, respected and reliable organisation, and we shall be substantially increasing its grant so that it can increase its staff to take on the additional tasks that I have outlined today.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the alarming tide of bogus asylum applications to which he has referred underlines the need to retain control of immigration policy as the prerogative of the British Government and the Westminster Parliament, and that those are not powers which can safely be delegated to the European Commission or the European Parliament?

Mr. Baker: Those powers are critical. I make it clear that the proposals that we have outlined today will be exercised by our Government because of our powers and responsibilities in the matter. I shall also be discussing with our partners in Europe their plans and proposals to see whether there are certain things that we can do together. For example, there is a proposal to exchange data so that we can see who are making multiple applications or applications in other countries as opposed to here. We shall be discussing such matters with our partners in Europe later this year.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will bear in mind those hon. Members who have not been called when we debate the matter. There are Home Office questions on Thursday, and I shall look with some sympathy on those who have not been called today if there are relevant questions on the Order Paper.

Points of Order

4.21 pm

Mrs. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a matter which should be of some concern to hon. Members and where there is a danger that the views of the House will be ignored.

Yesterday, the Government announced in a written parliamentary answer to a presumably planted question the details of the sell-off of the short-term division of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, despite the fact that the privatisation Bill has not completed its parliamentary proceedings and that this is a highly controversial matter about which many hon. Members have expressed concern, particularly because of their worries about the services that will be provided to British exporters by the preferred bidder, a Dutch company. Surely the Minister responsible should be prepared to come to the House and defend his views publicly and to answer as fully as possible the concerns and questions of hon. Members.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am a Member of Parliament for the Cardiff area where all the staff of the division of ECGD that is being privatised work. Those people are shocked that their fate has been consigned by way of a written answer, that the decision has apparently been taken by the Government even though the legislation may come back to this place in the light of the fearful hammering that it received on Second Reading in another place, and that the decision is being made that Amsterdam is the proper place for deciding the fate of the financing and reinsuring of Britain's exports. I consider that Cardiff is a proper place for insuring Britain's exports and it is open to question whether the democratic process in this House and in the other place has yet resulted in that decision.

Therefore, under what rule, other than the rule that the Government believe that it will go to Amsterdam—it is all part of the deep laid plot for the British Government to go from clogs to clogs in three generations——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We seem to be entering into the arguments of the matter. I have had no intimation from the Government that a statement is to be made on this subject, but doubtless the fact that it has been raised from the Front Bench will be borne in mind. If a statement is required, I suggest that negotiations take place through the usual channels.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) first, as I was given notice of it.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has emerged today that the Secretary of State for Scotland was told at a private meeting on Tuesday 4 June of the impending closure of the Dalzell platemill. At the meeting, the right hon. Gentleman told British Steel that the closure was solely a matter for the company.

On the same day, the Prime Minister sent a letter of public support to the Dalzell shop stewards. Surely the House is entitled to a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland—or at least an intervention in Thursday's debate—explaining exactly why the Conservative party can say one thing publicly in Scotland, while at the same time selling the workers down the river by saying something else at a private meeting in London.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has answered his own question. An opportunity will arise on Thursday to probe the matter.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I have two points of order, Mr. Speaker, but they are related.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think so.

Mr. Banks: In that case, I shall try one.

We have just heard a long statement from the Home Secretary in which many of us have a considerable constituency interest. It is most annoying for us to see copies of such statements being distributed in the Press Gallery when none are made available to us by the Vote Office. Those of us who have not been called find ourselves in double jeopardy, as we cannot even make our own remarks on the Home Secretary's statement because copies are not in the Vote Office.

My second point concerns procedure. When a Minister seeks permission to link two parliamentary questions, I assume that you, Mr. Speaker, can deny him that permission. It strikes me as entirely inappropriate for a Minister to link questions 6 and 18 when it is clear that question 18 will not be reached, and that certain assiduous Back Benchers will not be called as a result.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman himself is an assiduous Back Bencher, and he has asked two questions. I will answer the first.

I assume that copies of today's statement were embargoed until after it had been made. This is, however, an important point, which the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) might well put to the Procedure Committee. It has often occurred to me that it would benefit the House if copies were issued the day before statements were made, so that hon. Members could ask their questions against a background knowledge.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I asked this morning for a private notice question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not in order to mention such matters in the Chamber.

Mr. Hind: Have you, Mr. Speaker, received a request from the Department of Health for permission to make a statement on the licensing of the drug RU486? Many of my colleagues have noted from *The Sunday Times* and yesterday's *Evening Standard*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I dealt with that point of order yesterday, when I told the hon. Gentleman that I had received no notice that the Government wished to make a statement on the subject. I have nothing more to add.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Today is an Opposition day, and hon. Members are taking time out of the debate.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to go over the ground of this afternoon's statement, but I should like to know

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

whether you have received a request for the Government to explain, by means of another statement, whether they have any powers to prevent the entry into the United Kingdom of an EEC national—M. Le Pen, who is due to address a conference in two days' time at the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a bogus point of order if I ever heard one.

Mr. Nellist: No, it is not.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to abuse the procedure.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I have tabled a ten-minute Bill dealing with the question of refugees and asylum-seekers, and, like other hon. Members, I am now being asked to respond to the Home Secretary's statement. I wish to reflect accurately what the Home Secretary said.

Given that copies were not available in the Vote Office —which has just confirmed that it had no idea when the statement was coming, although I have seen journalists brandishing copies—will you make the strongest possible representations to the Home Office? Will you tell the Home Office that, if a Minister makes a statement here and copies are given to members of the Press Gallery, that is fine, but hon. Members expect to have copies as well—at the same time, if not earlier?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has a fair point. Hon. Members should be treated equally with members of the press—*[Interruption.]* Order. I am trying to be helpful.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will be within your knowledge that the Scottish Grand Committee is not sitting this week because the Secretary of State for Scotland has to accompany the Queen on royal duties in Scotland. Do you think that the Secretary of State should be at the royal garden party on Thursday or at the House of Commons answering questions on the closure of the Dalzell works?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know what is happening in Scotland on Thursday.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), if Mr. Le Pen wishes to come to Britain and he is an EC national, I judge that he will have no problems. There is no point of order for me in that matter.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It arises from your comments about the distribution of statements. I am not in a position to complain about that because minority parties and the Opposition Front Bench receive copies, so I am being objective. You said, Mr. Speaker, that in your view Back-Bench Members should be treated equally with the press. Perhaps you should reconsider that because there is a significant difference between us and the press in that we are elected to represent people.

Mr. Speaker: I do not quite understand the point. But I repeat that hon. Members should be able to ask their questions against a background of knowledge. It is particularly distasteful for Members of Parliament to be asked detailed questions by the press in the Lobby when they have not seen the statement.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I finish the point of order that I raised earlier? This place is, in a sense, the guardian of law and order in this country. I am asking for your ruling on how we seek to raise the fact that, given the nature of the individual concerned, there might be problems on Thursday with a noted racist such as Le Pen addressing a conference a few hundred yards from this building in which Sessional Orders pertain of which you are the guardian. Can something be done about it?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): May I help on this point?

Mr. Speaker: I do not need help. The hon. Gentleman is not yet Mr. Speaker. This is a matter for the police, not for me.

BILLS PRESENTED

Community Charge

(Disqualification for Non-payment)

Mr. Michael Shersby, supported by Mr. John Wilkinson and Mr. Terry Dicks, presented a Bill to provide that a person who by 1st August 1991 has not paid to a charging authority the community charge owed by him in respect of the year ended 31st March 1991 shall be disqualified for a period of five years from elected membership of a charging authority or a precepting authority: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 July and to be printed. [Bill 196.]

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland)

Mr. Bill Walker presented a Bill to amend the provisions of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 relating to the transfer of licences; and for connected purposes: And the same was read a First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 July and to be printed. [Bill 198.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland),

That the Matter of the National Health Service in Scotland, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland),

That the Matter of fishing and fish farming in Scotland, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Ministers of the Crown (Financial Interests)

4.33 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prevent Ministers of the Crown from having outside financial interests; and for connected purposes.

I hope that the Government support the Bill because it will demonstrate that they are setting their face against the prevailing greed in the boardrooms of privatised companies and that they are setting an example. So far, they have done nothing about this.

The May edition of the monthly bulletin "Labour Research" drew attention to the fact that 56 Conservative Members—it was not quite accurate because the figure is 62—are members of the Lloyd's insurance club. The 62 include 15 Ministers, among whom are four Cabinet Ministers—the Secretaries of State for Energy, for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales. On Wednesday 29 May that information appeared in a diary column in the London *Evening Standard* and an anonymous junior Minister was asked to comment. He said:

"There's no conceivable conflict of interest. Names are non-working members of Lloyds."

In the past, "non-working" meant that it was usual for the names to receive their profit and loss account, called a bordereau, and regularly pick up fat cheques. But losses have been incurred, so the claim of no conflict of interest for Ministers clearly did not, does not and will not hold true.

The chairman of Lloyd's sent a letter dated 17 May to members of Lloyd's making clear his attempts to influence the Government to obtain massive tax concessions for this rich elite, who, I remind the House, have to pledge £250,000, as a minimum, to join the club. Apparently, the chairman had abandoned belief in the marketplace, the unique advantages of Lloyd's and the sturdy independence and judgment of Lloyd's members—all of which were advanced as reasons for special powers and privileges to be given in a Bill which was passed by the House in 1982, against the Labour party's opposition.

The letter stated:

"I have been pursuing with the Government for some time certain aspects of the tax arrangements for Names. I had a meeting with the Chancellor last week when I received a sympathetic hearing. We discussed both reserving and the extension of a relief proposed in the Budget to Names."

The letter continued:

"The benefit to Names of such a carry-back of relief is clear. Extending the period of carry-back from one year, as at present, to three would increase the amount of income against which relief could be sought and repayment claimed. It would increase the likelihood that losses at Lloyd's would be relieved in full."

That could amount to more than £100 million. That was the claim that the chairman was seeking by attempting to influence the Government. He concluded his letter by saying:

"When I met the Chancellor I put to him in some detail the case for the provision to apply to the underwriting losses of Names. I received, as I have said, a sympathetic hearing and I hope that I shall be able to report a successful outcome to you in my June address."

In case hon. Members think that Lloyd's is at a disadvantage, it should be made clear that Lloyd's underwriters are, in effect, entitled to the same relief for a

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

trading loss as any other trader, including premiums of £3,000 a year for stop-loss policies which eradicate losses of more than £40,000.

The rules governing the conflict between Ministers' public duty and their private interests are set down in a confidential document called "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". A resume was sent to the Salmon royal commission on standards of conduct in public life, but curiously the commission did not include it as an appendix. The relevant section is paragraph 76 in the document issued by the former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, but the principles set out were summed up as follows:

"Ministers must so order their affairs that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their private interests and their public duties."

Paragraph 76, which is headed "'Names' at Lloyds", states:

"A Minister cannot properly continue to be a 'name' at Lloyds while holding office as Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer or Secretary of State for Trade . . . All Ministers are therefore required, on appointment whether to their first or to any subsequent Ministerial office, to obtain the permission of the Prime Minister before continuing a connection with Lloyds, however nominal, which they had established before appointment or establishing any such connection during their term of appointment."

Clearly, successive Prime Ministers have allowed the 15 Ministers to retain their holdings in Lloyd's after the Ministers had approached them under the rules.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Bill would require all Ministers to resign from Lloyd's. It may be argued that the Prime Minister's rules are adequate, but they are secret and we do not know how strictly they are applied. I have received many letters about the matter since it was raised in the House. One constituent said that he has been making a loss on the pools and if tax concessions are given to members of Lloyd's, he too deserves one.

I want to read one letter in particular which shows that the conflict of interests does not stop at the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The writer said:

"I would only add that, if such an approach can be justified by Lloyd's in respect of current Names, then one is entitled to ask why no such effort was made on behalf of victims of the PCW scandal . . . who had ultimately to bear the full brunt of Cameron-Webb's dishonesty, without receiving even an expression of sympathy, let alone any form of monetary contribution, from the Government.

The whole business stinks, the more especially as it looks very much as if the Names who are Ministers are taking advantage of their political offices for their private gain. In this context I cannot forget how different was this Government's reaction to the Cameron-Webb affair, when the then Attorney-General not only refused to take any steps to have that criminal extradited from the United States but even threatened to enter a 'nolle prosequi' if any private person were to attempt to institute any proceedings against him."

I shall read another section of the letter in case anyone thinks that it was written by a left-wing critic of Lloyd's. The writer said:

"I am in no way a man of the far Left—I was, indeed, a Tory MP for a long time".

I leave it to the House to guess which one.

There is a long history of trying to prevent Government Ministers from legislating for their own benefit. Campbell-Bannerman made a statement in 1906, as did Neville Chamberlain in 1939 and Winston Churchill in 1952. Those statements followed conflicts of interests among Ministers.

My Bill would provide a remedy for the present conflict over Lloyds by requiring Ministers to divest themselves of membership of Lloyd's. It would incorporate the relevant rules as currently applied by the Prime Minister and would provide powers for him to extend prohibitions by the affirmative resolution. It would be public and certain and it would, I hope, ensure legally that conflicts of interest could not occur in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bob Cryer, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Bernie Grant, Mr. Dave Nellist, Mr. Ronnie Campbell, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Ken Eastham and Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

MINISTERS OF THE CROWN (FINANCIAL INTERESTS)

Mr. Bob Cryer accordingly presented a Bill to prevent Ministers of the Crown from having outside financial interests; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 July and to be printed. [Bill 199.]

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I listened to the ten-minute Bill presented by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and I was interested in some of the evidence that he cited, especially the letters. I should like to research those letters a little further. As the hon. Gentleman read them out in the Chamber, should he allow them to be placed in the Library so that we can investigate them and find out who are the people involved?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. That is a debating point, and if the hon. Gentleman had wished to debate it, he should have raised it during the hon. Member's speech.

Opposition Day

[16TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Housing

4.43 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I beg to move,

That this House notes the abysmal failure of the Government's housing policy which after 12 years has resulted in record mortgage levels, record homelessness, the collapse of the public and private rented sector and a crisis in the construction industry; and calls on the Government to put forward proposals for a mortgage rescue scheme, an emergency programme to deal with homelessness and a phased release of the capital receipts from the sale of council houses to fund a planned increase in housing investment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I have to tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Gould: There is no mystery about housing in Britain. There is a growing housing crisis for two main and obvious reasons. First, we have failed to build enough houses and, secondly, the cost of housing has risen so fast that decent housing is now beyond the reach of a significant number of people. Those factors are a direct consequence of Government policy and there will be no improvement until there is a change of policy or, indeed, a change of Government.

The facts can be stated simply. The number of houses built in the 1980s was the lowest in any peacetime decade in this century. The 1990s have started even less promisingly. Housing starts for 1990 totalled only 184,000 and few people doubt that there will be a still sharper fall this year.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I have only just started. I shall give way very sparingly in view of the short time available.

The total figures are bad enough. However, the real pain is felt when we consider social and affordable housing. That is the sector where there has been the most damaging decline and where it hurts most. In 1978—the last year of the Labour Government—local authorities built 92,000 houses in England and Wales. That figure had fallen to a mere 13,000 by 1990 and it will fall still further this year. Indeed, it is the deliberate aim of Government policy—so we are told—that the figure should fall to zero very soon. Presumably, the intention is for the gap to be made up by housing associations and by the private sector. That has not happened.

Housing associations completed a mere 8,873 homes for rent in 1989—that is a welcome contribution, but nowhere near the scale required. The private sector—after a period in the mid-1980s when, it must be said, it was not social but luxury housing that was built—also suffered a sharp decline. In fact, it is gripped by the severest recession for decades.

The latest state of trade survey conducted in March and published in May by the Building Employers Confederation shows that the steep downward trend in output continues. The balance between those reporting higher and lower output has fallen for the ninth successive quarter to minus 70 per cent. That is the lowest figure on record. The industry predicts that 150,000 jobs will be lost this year. Skills will be lost, never to return. Business failures are at record levels and they include long-established family firms.

They are the facts about the supply of new housing. The facts about the cost of housing are no less powerful. Home owners were lured into home ownership by the boom, which was helped by the shortage of supply and they were then trapped by soaring interest rates. As a result, home ownership has become an impossible dream for many and an impossible nightmare for many more.

The number of repossessions, which stood at 46,940 in the year to March, has doubled in a year and it is predicted to double again in the coming year. Few would quarrel with that prediction. A Bank of England study which was recently published shows that 784,000—or one in 12—loans are two months or more in arrears. It is not surprising that homelessness due to arrears increased by 58 per cent. in the first quarter of 1991, and it is a major factor in the increasing burden placed on local authorities.

Tenants have found housing costs no easier to face. Private rents have risen sharply, reinforcing the evident truth that the private sector cannot meet the demand for affordable housing. Due to a deliberate Government decision, council rents have risen by an average of 12·3 per cent., although that average conceals much more extreme rises such as the successive rises imposed in Ealing.

It must also be remembered that it was the unfairness of the burden placed by Government policy on the housing revenue account and, therefore, on the tenants and their rents which led the Tory councillors in West Oxfordshire to resign last year. The unfair pressure requiring some tenants to pay for the subsidies payable to others continues.

Housing associations have also had to respond to high interest rates by raising rents. In 1990, new lets were at an average rent per week for a three-bedroomed house of between £46 and £54, beyond the reach of most low-income families. That was the conclusion of the joint report by the House-Builders Federation and the Association of District Councils entitled "Bridging the Affordability Gap in 1990". The report found that fewer than half all young people under the age of 30 could afford to buy their own homes and it called, not surprisingly and with our support, for 100,000 houses to be built each year for rent or shared ownership.

With the supply of housing drying up and the costs of housing rising sharply, it is little wonder that homelessness is increasing rapidly. No fewer than 145,790 households, or almost 400,000 people, have been accepted as homeless in the past year—a doubling of the number with which the Tory Government began the decade. Some 12,170 homeless households are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at an average cost of £15,440 per annum. That figure was described in May by the Public Accounts Committee as "bad value for money". The average cost per year of building those families a new home would be just half the cost of bed-and-breakfast accommodation at £8,200.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): On the topic of the availability of housing for families in need, will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that the 10 councils with

[Mr. Steve Norris].

the highest number of vacant dwellings—incidentally also the 10 councils with the highest amount of unpaid rent arrears—are under Labour control?

Mr. Gould: If the hon. Gentleman reads the report of the Public Accounts Committee, he will find that by far the greatest culprits in the matter—I defend no one who has a high proportion of housing stock empty—are the Government. The Public Accounts Committee want to hear the truth of the matter about the 31,000 houses that are currently empty.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No.

The position is worst in London. The report of Single Homeless in London estimates that 3,000 people are sleeping on London's streets. That is enough to make it difficult for even the most fastidious Minister to avoid stepping on them as he leaves the opera. The report puts the total of homeless in London——

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I may give the Minister a chance to intervene a little later. The report puts the total of homeless in London—living in squats, in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, in hostels and on the streets—at 52,500. The Salvation Army says that 75,000 people in London are what it describes as "visibly homeless". It says that the situation is as bad as it was in 1904.

The facts are depressing and damning and they cannot be gainsaid. The Government's excuse is that demand for housing has risen as the baby boom of the 1960s has taken effect and as a higher divorce rate has split families. That makes the failure to prevent the fall in supply even more culpable.

The facts are the record of a decade of failure of a Government who had the huge benefit of riches from the North sea, but who have ended the decade with the shameful spectacle of young people begging on our streets by day and sleeping on our streets by night. The facts are the record of a Government who proclaimed an economic miracle, but who failed to provide the most basic of human needs—a roof over one's head—for many of their citizens. The facts are the record of a Government who have provided great benefits to some via tax cuts, capital gains and salary increases—including those that we shall debate later today—but who have left hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of the most vulnerable people in our society in overcrowded slums or without homes at all. The facts are potent, but they conceal more than they tell.

The official statistics measure only the statutory definition of homelessness; they do not tell the full story. They certainly do not tell the story of the individual tragedies which are now occurring on a huge scale. Surely Conservative Members cannot be unaware of the tragedies, such as the young families divided, the young mothers driven to despair and mental illness and the fathers who have lost their families and therefore their homes, and who end up, as in the case of one of my constituents, sleeping in a car for two years. How did that happen?

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I will press on for the time being.

The first part of the answer lies in a fundamental mistake in Government economic policy. That assertion is hardly controversial any longer, as even Ministers now concede, in their more honest moments, that a huge consumer boom was unwisely unleashed on the basis of a surge in private sector credit which inflated property values and thereby created a new, though unstable, basis on which to construct a further edifice of credit. That tottering structure inevitably collapsed and the penal interest rates which were then put in place destroyed the private property market on which the Government had pinned all their hopes. Those who live by the market die by the market. Today's property market has killed not only the hopes of millions of families, but the illusions of the Government.

Mistakes are one thing, but deliberate prejudices carried into policy are another. The greater part of our housing failures have arisen because we have been saddled with a Government driven not by common sense but by ideology.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: That is why we have had almost total reliance on the private market and when it failed, consumed by the very forces that it unleashed, the Government had nothing on which to fall back. That is why we have had the tunnel vision that meant a total and exclusive emphasis on home ownership. Ministers could not and still cannot conceive that, for many people, renting is the preferable or possibly the only option.

Mr. Tracey *rose*——

Mr. Gould: Many of those persuaded by the prospect of an endless property boom to buy their homes must now bitterly regret that choice.

Ministers are still at it. They offer rent-into-mortgage schemes when the immediate need is to help with mortgage-into-rent schemes those for whom home ownership has become a short-cut to home loss.

Mr. Tracey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I will press on in the interests of the debate as a whole.

The ideological tunnel vision has produced the blind spot on the need for social housing and especially the need for housing for rent. The free market ideologues were content for everyone to take his or her chance in the marketplace. If that meant treating the homeless as a commodity to be traded in the marketplace and paying others to deal with them, as Westminster has tried to do, so be it. If that meant that the market created victims, it was their fault, not the Government's. If it meant that Ministers had to step on the homeless as they left the opera, what was that but a demonstration that the policy was working, however many tiny hands may have been frozen?

Sir George Young: No one who listened objectively to what I said last week about rough sleepers could have written the article to which the hon. Gentleman has

referred. It was a disgraceful, biased piece of journalism, ascribing to me views on rough sleepers which I have never held.

Mr. Gould: If the Minister claims to have been misreported, I sympathise with him. I imagine that no one was more shocked than he by the insensitive statement he was reported as making. The nature of insensitive remarks is their power to cast a spotlight on the dark places of Ministers' minds and of Government policy. The spotlight recorded a contempt for the homeless and a total lack of understanding of their plight and the Government's contribution to it.

The Government's attitude has led to a wholly irrational antipathy to public sector provision, with local authorities forbidden to spend their own money on housing and deliberately squeezed out by Government policy from any responsibility of meeting housing need. Ministers have learnt nothing from a decade of failure in that respect. Even those such as the Minister who have a reputation for more liberal views have been content to reinforce the ludicrous injunction against local authorities using their land, their money and their political will to meet a desperately required housing need.

We have an ideologue in action. At the conference of the Institute of Housing only last week, the Minister was at it yet again, telling local authorities that they were not to provide new housing and that they would have to put housing contracts out to compulsory competitive tender.

That heavy burden of ideology, which has so prejudiced our housing programme, brings me to the Secretary of State—or at least it would if he were present. The right hon. Gentleman is becoming the invisible man of the Department of the Environment—the ghost at the feast, or, in the case of housing, the ghost of famine. The right hon. Gentleman seems curiously reluctant to come to the Dispatch Box to defend what his Department is doing. It is true that he popped up only last week in a Liberal Supply day debate to do a spot of electioneering, but when it comes to the hard grind, the real responsibility and the true business of the Department—the council tax or the housing crisis—he is curiously not in evidence.

Why is the right hon. Gentleman so shy and so unwilling to face the music? On housing, the reason is not hard to find. He is, after all, a man with a record—a man with previous form. In being sent to the Department of the Environment, and to housing in particular, he is required to return to the scene of the crime. It is not only us who say that; let us see what the House-Builders Federation said in the January issue of *House Builder*. Mr. Roger Humber, director of the House-Builders Federation, reviewed the 1980s in the light of the Secretary of State's reappointment. He said that it was

"a decade of muddle and myth, of one step forwards, another sideways, followed by two backwards. And central to this muddle and myth was Michael Heseltine."

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I have not finished this interesting article.

Mr. Hind: After that?

Mr. Gould: I make no promises.

Mr. Humber continues:

"Probably the most important contribution to undermining the proper purpose of planning was Heseltine's refusal to permit any strategic evaluation of housing requirements . . . This was quite the most catastrophic stance any Minister could possibly have taken . . . the outcome of the Heseltine policy was not record levels of housebuilding; just the opposite . . . On average, new private sector housebuilding output was around 150,000 pa; exactly the same as in the 1970s. And public housing continued to fall."

I am delighted that the Secretary of State has arrived just in time for the coup de grace. Mr Humber says:

"The 1980s therefore was a decade of failure in housing policy".

The Secretary of State

"left us with a decade at the end of which we have to start trying to deal again with the same issues he refused to face . . . In 1852, Marx said that history does repeat itself. The first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. We've had the tragedy: can we avoid the farce, now that he's back?"

Mr. Gregory *rose*——

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton) *rose*——

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I am glad that the Secretary of State has so many ardent defenders.

There can seldom have been a more savage indictment of the record of a Minister or Government, and that from a source—the House-Builders Federation—which, at the very least, is not a natural opponent of a Tory Government.

Mr. Hind: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I shall not give way at the moment.

The way out of this mess is to escape from the ideological dead-end in which the Government have trapped themselves. First, we must acknowledge that whatever the strengths of the market the provision of social and affordable housing is a community responsibility. The homeless are not only of concern to opera-goers but a blot on all our consciences.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. When a Minister has made a personal declaration that reported remarks attributed to him were untrue, and when it has been accepted by the Opposition's spokesman, is it in order or within the conventions of the House for that spokesman to continue to read from a prepared text and to prosecute the allegations that have been disclaimed?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You heard the Minister's intervention. Not once did he deny that he used those words. What are all the complaints about? He may not like their interpretation, but he used those words about the homeless.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are a couple of hours to go and I hope to call as many hon. Members as possible who can refute, deny or agree with those allegations.

Mr. Gould: I make the point again: the homeless are not only of concern to opera-goers but a blot on all our consciences. If a wealthy country cannot put roofs on the heads of its citizens, that is a failure of political analysis and will. Government intervention is necessary because, as all the survey evidence shows, the market will not provide the social housing that is desperately needed. It is a question not just of money but of things that do not cost

[Mr. Gould]

money, such as the availability of land. That is why we propose, for example, a new use class for land for social and affordable housing.

Secondly, we should forget the ridiculous dividing line between public and private-sector providers. Those who need decent accommodation at affordable rents simply do not care whether the providers are politically correct in the view of the Secretary of State or anyone else. What they need are homes. Surely all the evidence shows that if we are to meet that need the public sector must be involved. It simply does not make sense to exclude its resources, expertise and political will. What matters is that houses are built, and as local authorities have up to £5 billion in capital receipts, why not, subject to suitable safeguards, let them spend part of it? The need is too great for us to worry about picking and choosing on ideological grounds between the various instruments that are available to us. We should use every instrument that is at our disposal. That means housing associations and the private sector but also local authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch) *rose——*

Mr. Gould: I give way to my neighbour.

Mr. Squire: I am grateful to my geographical neighbour. As the hon. Gentleman is, I hope, dealing with the private sector, will he stress his party's commitment and non-ideological approach by giving its attitude to the private sector? In particular, will he confirm for how long it has not been Labour party policy to offer private tenants the right to purchase?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who will wind up the debate, made an excellent speech to the Institute of Housing in which he set out extremely interesting and imaginative policies on the private sector and how we shall treat private landlords. The effect of that will be to reverse the 80,000 per year loss of private rented accommodation from the housing stock. That is our objective.

We should be considering the possibility of collaborative partnership arrangements between local authorities and the private sector. If borrowing to build houses to meet housing need is a good idea for the private sector, why is not the same borrowing of equal benefit if done by the public sector?

Thirdly, we should not be too preoccupied with the lawyers' consent of tenure, and I speak as a person with legal training. Home ownership appeals to many people and will continue to do so, but there will always be others who prefer to rent, and there may be many more whose preferences, for family and financial reasons, may change from one part of their lives to another.

Instead of trying to compress everyone into the same mould, why not work on providing as much flexibility as possible and on achieving the most level playing field between different forms of tenure? We should encourage building societies and housing associations to devise, as they would like to, mortgage-into-rent schemes, part-rent, part-buy schemes and shared ownership schemes and we should provide the funding arrangements to make that possible.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I am about to finish.

Above all, if we are serious about tackling the housing crisis, as we must be, we must build more houses. I call on the Government even now to put the unused resources, skills and capital to work—to release some of the money currently held by local authorities so that, with the help of the construction industry, they can build immediately 50,000 homes in a crash programme, so as to make a start on housing the homeless. That would be only a start, but a start already too long delayed.

If the Minister will not commit himself to that simple, direct and humane step now, the homeless and all those whose housing needs are not met will, along with the rest of the country, draw only one conclusion: they need a Labour Government to provide them with the houses that they need. We shall do that job for them.

5.11 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the policies being pursued by Her Majesty's Government to put a decent home within the reach of every family by promoting owner occupation, by securing greater private sector investment in housing and by directing public expenditure effectively towards those people and areas that most need support.'.

I welcome the opportunity to set out the Government's housing strategy. I believe that our broad-based approach is right. We are maximising investment from all sources, not just the public sector. We are developing new forms of tenure, such as rent-to-mortgage and shared ownership, and new forms of social landlord, such as the housing action trusts. We are introducing new partnerships with the housing associations, and a new regime for private landlords. That approach is the right one.

We want to work with the grain of people's aspirations and with the grain of market forces. The Government's approach is more likely to succeed than is the more narrowly based approach advocated by the Labour party, which leans more heavily on local authorities and public finance which might not be available. As we have just heard, that approach turns its back on some of the more radical conclusions that we are developing and would lose the possibility of contributions from institutional finance.

The Labour party's approach has not changed over the years. There is an over-reliance on public expenditure, but this time it is based on public finance which will not be there. I ask the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who, as I understand it, has just given a commitment to enter a crash programme for building 50,000 extra homes, whether he has the authority of the shadow Chief Secretary in making that commitment.

Mr. Gould: That commitment has been on the record for at least a year. The Minister made a statement about private institutional finance which had no basis in anything that I have said or in any document that the Labour party has produced. As I categorically stated the opposite, I invite him to withdraw his remark.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman should examine some of his party's proposals for the private rented sector. He will find it more difficult to raise respectable institutional funds for investment in the private rented sector if he adheres to his proposals for rent control. There is a direct trade-off. We want to maximise

the contribution that the private sector can make. We do not have the Labour party's dogmatic approach to the private sector.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No. This is a short debate and I want to make progress.

Not only can the Government's approach promote better housing, it can help bring down some of the barriers in our society and eliminate some of the fault lines that demarcate too many of our inner-city areas. We all know of estates designed by people who do not have to live in them and occupied by people who do not want to live in them. We want to turn those estates round, with the help of the residents and of private funds. We want the yeast of home ownership to raise the standards on those estates and transform the lives of those who live there. I should like to say a word in a moment about housing action trusts, whose potential the Labour party discounts.

The guilty men are not those accused in the hon. Gentleman's speech. They are local councils, such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), that leave properties unlet while families wait in bed and breakfast, that leave rents uncollected and plead shortage of money for maintenance. In London, the 10 least efficient local authorities had not collected £135 million in rent by the end of March 1990, and on 1 April 1991 owned 21,200 empty properties. That compares with 12,000 families in bed and breakfast at the same time. None of those authorities was controlled by my party. All but one were controlled by the Labour party. Profligacy and inefficiency are the hallmark of Labour in government. It is no response for Labour Members to refer to properties owned by the Ministry of Defence. Those properties are needed as soldiers and their families return to this country from west Germany and the middle east.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Let us get the facts right. Committees of the House have pointed out that local authorities of all political complexions have specific problems with some empty properties and have suggested, rightly, that something be done about it, including Government action. We cite not Ministry of Defence properties, but those owned by the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, 16 per cent. of whose properties are empty. Many of those properties are kept empty for sale or demolition. I challenge the Minister to make those properties available for homeless people now.

Sir George Young: Most of the properties are owned by the Ministry of Defence and are needed for the purposes that I have just described.

Before I tackle the problems raised by the hon. Member for Dagenham, let me put them in focus. The total housing stock has increased by nearly 2 million since we came to office. The population has risen less fast, so there are now more homes per thousand of the population than when we started. In 1979 there were 377 dwellings per thousand of the population whereas in 1990 there were 406 dwellings per thousand.

Professor Duncan MacLennan, in a report entitled "Affordable Housing in Europe" published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said:

"By international standards, Britain is well-housed. It has a well-developed and efficient set of private housing finance institutions and a complex, expensive set of government subsidy measures".

Professor MacLennan outlines areas of concern to which I shall return, such as homelessness, affordability and the private rented sector, but he finished with the following warning:

"one of the major realisations of the British Housing sector in the last two decades has been that a massive, monopolistic social housing provision can move rapidly from 'solution' to 'problem'."

I mentioned housing action trusts, which I believe are a solution that we can offer to estates such as those to which I referred. There is a growing gulf between the dogma of the Front-Bench Labour party spokesmen and the more realistic approach adopted by Labour councils in touch with reality. The Labour party is officially against housing action trusts. The housing spokesman is on the record as saying that he would wind up the Hull HAT and return it to the city council. That is an extraordinary commitment. The tenants have just voted two to one to leave Hull council control and to go to a housing action trust. The Labour party is for ever asking for local ballots on Government initiatives. It now proposes to overrule them when the results do not conform to its prejudices.

Nor is it just Hull that backs our proposals for a HAT. The leadership in Liverpool—a regime which apparently has the full backing of the Labour party—is now actively investigating the feasibility of a HAT for its tower blocks. Other Labour-controlled local authorities are also recognising that a housing action trust may be the right solution for some of their estates. The Labour party is divided.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister not recognise in any way that much of the appalling misery of so many people —not only the homeless or near-homeless and families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but many of our constituents who have young children yet who have to live with their parents or their in-laws—is because since 1979 there has been an 85 per cent. reduction in local authority starts? What sort of dogma forces so many people to live in misery because the Government will not allow local authorities to do their rightful job?

Sir George Young: That argument will not hold. The hon. Gentleman makes the same mistake as did the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, who referred to the reduction in local authority spending without mentioning the growing budget of the Housing Corporation. That budget is growing from £1·1 billion last year to £2 billion for 1993-94. One must put that fact on the table, too, and examine overall expenditure rather than focus on one part of the market.

Mr. Tracey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. It makes a pleasant change from the behaviour of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). My hon. Friend has been talking about public funds and public housing. Instead of going round the edge, will he answer the question: when will the Government do something to force the hands of local authorities that refuse to collect rents and that keep properties empty although people are homeless? It is a public disgrace. My hon. Friend spoke of £135 million in uncollected rents and he knows as well as

[Mr. Tracey]

I do that in London alone there are tens of thousands of empty properties. We must get those properties back into use, because people are on the streets.

Sir George Young: One way in which to deal with the problem that my hon. Friend has identified is to give more power to tenants and to enable them to take responsibility for their estates, which I suspect they would run more effectively and competently than many local authorities. I assure my hon. Friend that we are considering the matters that he has raised to see whether we can protect tenants from the incompetence of their local authority landlords.

Housing action trusts are not just about public money. They represent a fresh approach to difficult-to-let estates by setting up a single-minded agency—not encumbered with other responsibilities, and with tenants on its board—which can bring in private funding, produce a five-year strategy for modernising the properties and improving the management, and then give tenants a choice as to who manages their homes thereafter. The tenants can go back to their former landlord if they want to.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I served on the Committee that considered the Bill under which the trusts were set up. The Government rejected an amendment that we tabled which would have allowed those houses to return to local authority control. Are not the hon. Gentleman's officials now going round the country informing local authorities that, after the period of the trust has elapsed, the tenancies will return to them? Has not the hon. Gentleman changed the terms of the offer?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman confirms what I have just said. The trusts will then give the tenants a choice as to who manages their homes. If the tenants want to go back to the local authority landlord at the end of the period, they will be free to do so. I suspect that many of them will prefer to buy their homes after they have been improved. They may prefer to choose a housing association to manage their homes or they may want to manage their homes themselves through an estate management board. The point is that, at the end of the day, the decision will rest with the tenants.

Estate action is another policy that is relevant to those who live on difficult estates. Some 600 schemes up and down the country have been implemented, renovating 300,000 units, improving management, diversifying tenure, providing training opportunities and making the estates places where people want to live. In the past year, we have built on our success, increasing resources from £190 million to £268 million, of which £126 million will be available for new schemes. I shall shortly be inviting local authorities to bid for estate action resources next year. I wonder how many Labour Members acknowledge that as the contribution of a Conservative Government.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: I shall give way once more, but then, in fairness to those who wish to speak in the debate, I must make some progress.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend has made a good point. He will be aware that in the new town of Skelmersdale, which has 25 Labour councillors, it took the Conservative-controlled district council to recognise the need of two of the most run-down estates in Digmore and Tanhouse and produce imaginative estate action plans. The first of them has now been implemented. Before the estate action plan, there were 3,000 requests for transfers from the estate; now there is a waiting list of those who want to be housed on it. The second estate action plan, in Tanhouse, is also making good progress. That is a credit to my hon. Friend's Department and to imaginative Conservative housing policy.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his glowing tribute to the work of my Department. I hope that local authorities will realise the potential of estate action and put in bids when we invite them for next year.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: For the last time.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend will be aware that my local authority, Kirklees, took a long time to be shamed into using the estate action programme. When my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary visited the area recently, he saw that the authority had not made such a good job of it. The authority is now saying that it is almost too much trouble to bother with estate action, thus condemning its tenants to a future without help. Is that not a disgrace?

Sir George Young: I very much regret that the authority has taken that narrow approach. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I would like to take a further look to see how we can rescue the tenants from their plight.

One strand of our efforts to improve the quality of life on run-down estates is an initiative, under the auspices of Professor Coleman, in which the impact of the physical redesign of such estates is tested. I am pleased to announce today the seventh scheme to be included in the experiment, which is on the Durham estate in Sandwell. Some £2·9 million of Government resources are being devoted to the scheme which will ensure the transformation of 261 homes.

The hon. Member for Dagenham did not touch on the policy of large-scale voluntary transfer. That policy is releasing resources tied up in council housing, part of which can then be reinvested. Sixteen local authorities, none of them Labour, have balloted their tenants and subsequently transferred their stock to a housing association. That has brought in more than £1 billion of entirely private-sector finance. It has enabled repairs to be carried out more quickly than if the stock had remained in council ownership.

Independent research into the results of the first transfers has revealed a high level of satisfaction with the new landlord and greater tenant participation in management. In the two years since the first transfer, the New Chiltern housing association has succeeded in reducing both rent arrears and the volume of empty dwellings. At the same time, part of the capital receipt has been used to finance a substantial new-build programme carried out by the association. That shows how local authorities, tenants, housing associations and private investors can come together to fund better homes and more homes without increasing public expenditure. It is an approach that Labour, with its slavish adherence to the drab policy of municipalisation, has so far rejected.

Mrs. Currie: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: For the last, last time.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that housing associations deserve tremendous congratulations on the first class way in which they are now running a great deal of the country's private rented housing? Is my hon. Friend aware that housing associations take over property not only from councils? Not long ago, housing associations in my constituency took over a substantial number of properties that used to belong to British Coal. They have modernised the properties and are looking after tenants much better than the previous landlord. I should, therefore, like to put on record my appreciation of the housing associations concerned.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The key point about resourcing housing associations, as opposed to local authorities, is that housing associations can go to the City. They can top up the resources that the Government make available to provide more units. A local authority cannot do that. The direction of funds in that way not only helps the housing association movement; it ensures that there are more houses for people who need them.

I should like to press the Labour party on the question of capital receipts. Labour housing spokesmen seem to think that they can increase spending on housing, without incurring the displeasure of the shadow Chief Secretary, by spending capital receipts. That will not do. Capital receipts are used to reduce the level of debt. Under the new regime, we have allocated part of the spending power from those areas with receipts to those without receipts. If capital receipts are to be spent again, the money will have to be borrowed—as is the case with any spending commitment not covered by higher taxes—with the usual impact on interest rates and the PSBR.

The key question in the debate on housing is not the rather narrow one that the hon. Member for Dagenham asked: how many rented houses can the local councils build? The debate should be much broader than that. We should ask ourselves how we can maximise total investment in housing of all tenures. The question does not revolve around public investment alone. As I have said, the housing associations are increasingly borrowing from the City to complement what we allocate. That does not score as public expenditure. Private builders are building low-cost homes on land owned by councils or on land secured by the exceptions policy.

Home ownership is the ambition of most people, and we have enabled 1·5 million former local authority tenants to buy their homes. Our recent research has shown that 96 per cent. of them felt that, taking everything into account, they were pleased to have bought. Few of those people would have achieved that ambition if the Labour party had had its way. Of those who bought between 1985 and 1987, 90 per cent. carried out significant repairs and improvements.

Not only has the policy helped those who bought; it has helped those who have not. The local authorities have been relieved of the burden of maintaining and managing these homes, and the amount spent on capital renovation and on management and maintenance of the remaining stock has increased. Spending on capital renovation increased from £150 per dwelling in 1980-81 to £450 this year—a real increase of more than 50 per cent. Spending on management and maintenance increased from less than £300 per dwelling to £800 per dwelling—a real increase of 40 per cent. There is scope for promoting home ownership yet further, perhaps by building more properties for shared ownership—for those who can afford a council rent but cannot afford the full costs of home ownership.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose*——

Sir George Young: I give way for the last, last, last time.

Mr. McKay: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way—I had been waiting to intervene. My authority does everything that the Minister has been talking about. It uses every means to finance its housing but now, for the first time in its history, its housing policy is ruined. That is the result of the Government's policies. Furthermore, for the first time in its history, it now has homeless people.

On home ownership, will the Minister consider a problem that is occurring in my area? I refer to the people who bought council houses but who can no longer afford them. Those people have found that they cannot get out and that there is nowhere for them to go. They have to rely on the local authority, which no longer has any houses for rent. Could not a scheme be introduced to allow local authorities to buy back such properties from those who can no longer afford them?

Sir George Young: That brings me straight on to the problem of repossessions, which has already been referred to. It is untrue to claim that the Government are doing nothing to help those who face difficulties with their mortgage. In 1989-90, £350 million was paid in income support to help people who were eligible to pay their mortgage. There has been some comment in the light of one case, that the system is too generous rather than too tight.

Nor do I accept the gloomy forecasts that are made of future repossessions. Over the past three years, people have had difficulty maintaining payments, as interest rates rose faster than their incomes. This put pressure on their budgets, leading in some cases to greater arrears. But, with base rates falling 3·5 per cent. in less than a year, and incomes for those in work rising by 4·5 per cent., that source of pressure is clearly reducing. Those who coped during the period of rising interest rates should be able to cope as they fall. I would, therefore, hope to see fewer repossessions because of that imbalance.

The pressure in future may come from rising unemployment, but it is important to understand that redundancy or long-term illness no longer means the loss of a home. If there is an entitlement to income support, that will pay half the reasonable mortgage interest for the first 16 weeks and all the interest thereafter, including any interest on any arrears that have accrued during the 16 weeks. So if someone loses his or her job, claims income support, contacts his or her building society to put it in the picture, and then pays over the income support to the building society, the building society would be most unlikely to contemplate possession proceedings. So although I am, of course, concerned at the information coming through—there are many repossessions in the pipeline—the changing circumstances to which I have referred may mean that some forecasts are too gloomy.

Other options are available to minimise the trauma of repossession. I understand that, through a housing association, Mole Valley council is offering shared

[Sir George Young]

ownership to owner-occupiers who cannot afford the full cost, leaving them in their homes as part-owners, part-renters. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) may find that point relevant. Some building societies may be willing to allow owners to rent out their homes for a while or to roll up some interest until things improve. Surprisingly, only a minority of mortgage payers with repayments set annually have taken advantage of the chance to have their repayments reviewed to reflect the recent cuts in mortgage rates.

I had intended to say something about the private rented sector and our plans for it but, out of respect to the many hon. Members who wish to speak, I shall skip that and turn finally to rough sleeping. In the past six months, we have witnessed in our capital city the most concerted and best resourced attempt ever to help rough sleepers. The front-line agencies, whose work I applaud, have in the first six months reduced by about half the number of people sleeping rough in central London. The programme of investing £96 million in direct access hostels and move-on accommodation is only one third of the way through—with about 1,000 of the planned 3,300 places available. The Bull-Ring, by Waterloo station, known as "cardboard city", is closed, with all of those who were sleeping there being offered alternative accommodation —although some have refused it.

I recognise that we have some way to go. I am concerned about the numbers of people in Lincolns Inn Fields, but we have plans for more hostels nearby which should be open this autumn. I also welcome the help from the Department of Health, which is providing high-care hostels and outreach teams with medical skills to help those rough sleepers who suffer from mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. I am determined that the momentum we have built should be maintained and the policy seen through.

I have recently spoken critically not of rough sleepers but of professional, aggressive beggars, who prey on passers-by, tourists in the west end and young homeless people, who, when arrested, turn out to have fixed addresses and substantial sums of money on them. That group would like us to confuse them with young vulnerable people with no homes. We must make sure that we do not.

In conclusion, our policy is based not on a massive municipal expansion programme, but on diversity of provision, on encouraging the public sector to work closely with the private sector, on bringing in fresh funds to deal with the worst of the problems, and on offering choice and diversity to as many people as possible. Old prejudices and preconceptions must be overturned. The best local authorities are already working with housing associations, using their urban renewal powers and their planning powers, working up proposals for city challenge, estate action, priority estates projects, housing action trusts, large-scale voluntary transfer, and promoting rural trusts in our smaller villages. I ask the House to endorse that approach by voting for the amendment.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister was absolutely right: many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, so brief speeches would be appreciated by all of us.

5.35 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Thank you for calling me so early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an outrage that the Government should have sought to make a statement today, thus leaving less than an hour for Back-Bench Members to speak on this important topic. However, I shall be brief, as you have requested, Madam Deputy Speaker, because many of my hon. Friends wish to speak in this important debate.

The motion encapsulates the Government's abject failure throughout the 12 years of their administration to provide a coherent and meaningful policy that would give everyone in this country the right to a decent home. Listening to the Minister's speech was like hearing an echo from the past. He simply rehearsed all the arguments that were advanced by one of his predecessors during the Second Reading of the Housing Act 1988. The Minister rehashed those earlier policies although any objective analysis and the panic measures that the Government have recently undertaken on homelessness prove that the Government have no real understanding of people's need and right to live in a decent home.

In that Second Reading debate in 1987, the Government outlined what they viewed as their flagship policies for housing in the 1990s. The Government were proud of their Bill and its main initiatives, some of which the Minister referred to, such as the housing action trusts, the ability of local tenants to opt out of local authority control of housing, the market rent system and the introduction of assured tenancies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has already said, ably led by our spokesman on housing, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), the Opposition Members who served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill made it clear then that the Government's policies had no relevance to people's needs and that they would not work.

If we look at the way in which those policies have affected my city of Manchester during the past four years, we can see that we were right to oppose them and that we are right to say today that they still do not have any relevance to or meet the housing needs of cities such as Manchester. First, how many housing action trusts have been welcomed and introduced throughout the country? Very few. One of the first to be suggested in the first tranche of housing action trusts for Manchester was rejected out of hand by the people of Manchester.

Secondly, how many council tenants in Manchester have requested a ballot because they want to leave local authority control, and how many ballots have taken place? There has been not one ballot and not a single request for one because the people of Manchester know that their landlord—the council—is trying to deliver a service and that the only reason that it cannot is that it has been starved of resources.

Thirdly, in the Government's terms, have market rents in the private rented sector delivered a massive expansion in the number of homes that people can afford? Again, the answer is no because, although there has been an increase in the private rented sector in Manchester, it has been only

in the luxury private rented sector where rents are at levels that most people cannot afford. People can afford such rents only if they are rich or if the private landlord has ripped off the housing benefit system and tried to increase the rent at the expense of public subsidy. I welcome and applaud Manchester city council's initiative to drive out such landlords by saying, "We are not prepared to sanction the rent levels that those landlords are trying to charge on the back of housing benefit." The Government should condemn that practice also because that is not the way to create affordable rents in the private rented sector.

The Minister wants us to consider public expenditure on housing in conjunction with allocations made to housing associations. More important, we must examine bids for resources made by councils such as Manchester for their housing investment programmes, because they clearly identify, both in the public and private sectors, the money that is needed to provide decent houses in their areas.

An examination of the bid compared with the allocation finally granted shows that the Government have had no commitment to the provision of resources for decent housing in our cities. In Manchester, for example, £189 million was sought in 1988-89 and £29 million was allocated. In 1989-90, £210 million was sought and Manchester received only £19 million. There was an increase in 1990-91, because £100 million was sought and £52 million received. Even so, in that year, Manchester received only half of what it really needed to deal with its housing stock. In the current year, from a bid of £127 million, the city received £61 million.

It is clear from the figures that the council has not been able to improve, modernise, install heating and so on for the houses that are required by Manchester families. The result is that we have a record number of homeless, with over 7,000 people in the city seeking their first decent home.

We must examine the implications of that situation on the private sector and renovation grants. In the last year, the city of Manchester received an allocation from the Exchequer of £3·405 million, a 75 per cent. allocation, to enable the private sector to renovate its stock. Out of that sum must be funded disablement grants, to enable people with disabilities to adapt their homes, and so on. So in the last year, 1,250 applicants wanting about £8 million have had to get what they can from the paltry allocation of £3 million or a little over.

With the rundown in the public and private sectors of housing, we are storing up problems for future generations. As our private stock of housing falls into disrepair, the people of the future will not have their housing needs met. We have heard enough about the rundown in the house building programme to know that in the future there will be greater demands on the public sector to house people, but homes will not be available for them.

I have some suggestions for the way in which we, including the Labour party, should be examining the housing issue for the future. We can have a coherent housing policy only if we tackle root and branch the problem of housing finance and the ways in which, in the future, we fund the public and private sectors.

I welcome the report published last week by the Rowntree trust, chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh, which advocated such a root and branch review of housing finance. Until we equalise subsidies between the different sectors, and conduct a thorough examination of mortgage tax relief and the amount available through subsidy and benefits to the private rented sector, we shall not free the resources necessary to expand the different tenures in the housing market.

That report rekindled a debate that has been going on for many years. I made a modest contribution to that debate over 12 years ago in a research project at York university with Professor Jonathon Bradshaw, in which we advocated the development of a universal housing allowance. In an article in *Roof* magazine entitled "Can a housing allowance work?" we examined the first stage of such an allowance, which was the integration of what was then supplementary benefit housing payments with rent rebates.

We moved from there to look at the possibility of integrating all subsidies, whether in the owner-occupied sector through mortgage tax relief or through the public or private rented sectors, to see whether we could contribute modestly to a debate allowing for the easier transfer of people between and within tenures.

We accept—I hope that the Labour party will examine this seriously; I appreciate that it could not be done overnight—that the phasing out of mortgage tax relief, if it became policy, would take many years. That was said by the Duke of Edinburgh's study. But unless we start heading in that direction, with a massive explosion in subsidy, £9 billion will be spent in the next couple of years on mortgage tax relief. That money would be better spent on providing decent housing.

We must have a subsidy arrangement providing a housing allowance that can be cashed in to enable people to move into any form of tenure, at any stage, in the owner-occupied or rented sectors. Such a step would achieve greater mobility because people would not be locked into mortgages in areas from which they cannot move because of fluctuating house prices. Such a housing allowance would free the market and give people the opportunity to move and have different tenures at different times of their lives. They would do that when it suited them, instead of being financially penalised by having locked themselves into mortgages at an early stage.

Bearing in mind the proposals of the Rowntree trust, I hope that the Government will take action along the lines that have been recommended. I feel sure that the Labour party will take the matter seriously, for unless we have a root and branch study of housing finance in Britain, and find ways to free resources to ensure the right of everyone to a decent home, we shall never make progress.

We will tackle the problem of homelessness not by initiatives that resemble panic measures and not by examining incoherent policies, the long-term implications of which cannot be foreseen, but by accepting that a thorough examination of housing finance is the key to housing in the future. The next Labour Government will take the issue seriously because my hon. Friends and I appreciate, as the motion says, that the mark of a civilised society is the provision of decent homes for its people.

If we do not put housing high on the political agenda, future generations will not forgive us. The citizens of Manchester understand that, and because they put housing high on the agenda, they will vote accordingly at the next general election.

5.46 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I am grateful for having been called early in this short debate and I wish at the outset to congratulate the Minister on the knowledgeable and constructive way in which he dealt with the subject. He is increasingly recognised among housing practitioners as a person who appreciates the difficulties that they are endeavouring to overcome, and I congratulate him on his efforts so far.

I cannot say the same about the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who wove a tale of gloom and woe. I listened in vain to that part of his speech in which I thought he might produce some constructive proposals, but what little his remarks contained was unspecific and he did not answer any questions.

The hon. Gentleman said that his party and others should forget the ridiculous dividing line between public and private providers. I shall concentrate on that initially, particularly the question of voluntary transfers, to which the Minister referred. Regrettably, there has been no significant example of a voluntary transfer to a pre-existing independent housing association. Twenty nine specially formed housing associations have been created for specific local authority areas, of which 16 have been successful at ballot while 13 have been unsuccessful. About 70,000 houses have been transferred so far. While I do not belittle that achievement, it is a smaller number than had been hoped for, and certainly fewer than the merits of such transfers justify.

Where there has been a willing local authority and a willing housing association, often the stumbling block has been the way in which the campaign preceding a ballot has been undertaken. There are a number of examples of how entrenched interests against a transfer taking place have been ill-informed. Arguments have often been presented to tenants in a highly distorted way and tenants have been led to believe that penalties would ensue should they support a voluntary transfer. Believing in the argument that better the devil they know than the devil they do not know, tenants have accordingly voted against the proposed transfer.

Mrs. Peacock: Does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities such as Kirklees, which is my authority, have taken an ideological view on that matter and, over the past four years, have lost about £12 million in housing development money because of their silly socialist principles?

Mr. French: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Her council is one of many where opportunities to bring more resources into the sector have been missed or rejected for ideological reasons. My constituency of Gloucester has had a similar experience. The arguments deployed against transferring to an independent housing association were grossly distorted and ill-informed. One of the difficulties is that the prospective housing association is obliged to put forward a firm proposal, with reliable figures for the projection of future rents and an explanation of how the financial package will hold together. But those who wish to oppose the proposal can refute those figures without, in turn, having to demonstrate that what they say is correct. Although they may have criticised the prospect of increased rents and argued that the local authority could secure lower rent levels over a particular period, in the event it may not prove to be the case. However, by the time that becomes evident the arguments against voluntary transfer have prevailed.

The voluntary transfer to a local housing association —one that emerges from a local authority—is akin to a management buyout. It suits some people but does not necessarily suit everyone. However, those who are unwilling to go down that route seem to me to have another option. Self-governing trusts have been introduced in respect of hospitals and the equivalent in education is grant-maintained status. By the same token there is a sound argument for local authority housing departments becoming charitable trusts. Those who are persuaded towards trust status, whether they are in schools or hospitals, are attracted to the opportunity to provide better internal management, a more productive use of resources and a better capacity to deliver the service to consumers. Those who run the services have a better opportunity to find the right solutions to solve the problems facing them.

That principle can easily be adapted to local authority housing departments. A charitable trust emerging from a local authority housing department would be the recipient of the local authority department's assets and liabilities, but the authority would continue to act as banker and would retain the debt profile serviced by the trust and secured on the properties. Like other trusts, the trust could appoint outsiders to manage it and inject private sector expertise into its operations.

I do not claim to be the originator of that idea. Some housing practitioners have already put it forward and explained it far more eloquently than I have. However, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the principle carefully because it has great merits.

Other examples of ingenious housing initiatives can be drawn from international experience. One such example is rather confusingly known as the correlation insurance indemnity. Anyone who mentions the word "insurance" in a housing debate is quickly shouted down, but I refer to the experience in New South Wales—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) laughs. It so happens that the housing profile in New South Wales is remarkably similar to the housing profile in a number of areas in this country. The housing department there has made an especially useful arrangement through the National Bank of Australia. Without going into the details of the system, which is complex, it boils down to a cost efficient way to obtain private finance to build substantially more houses than would otherwise be built through conventional methods. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that example as it could be adapted to the United Kingdom's experience.

One of the difficulties has been to persuade financial institutions that housing associations are appropriate organisations in which to place funds. That was well illustrated three years ago, when North housing association endeavoured to raise money in the City. At that time, it said that the biggest two difficulties were the two words in its name—"north" and "housing"—which put off many institutions that might otherwise have been persuaded to lend money. It overcame that difficulty and convinced the financial institutions that it was a viable haven for their funds. However, housing associations have often failed to present their case effectively to financial institutions. Housing associations executives have often failed to distinguish between what the financial institutions

seek in terms of equity and where they would place fixed interest loans. One is suitable for risk and the other clearly is not. The packages put together by housing associations have not always recognised that.

There is also an urgent need for housing associations to rethink how they present their accounts. Some hon. Members will know that they have a curious way of presenting them. It is largely misunderstood, or not understood at all, in the City and it puts many City institutions off. A little effort to reconsider the presentation of those accounts would go a long way.

A viable rented sector needs willing landlords for whom renting is worth while, tenants who can afford to pay the rents, an arithmetic that stacks up, and a political framework with some continuity. Those are obvious requirements, but there are obstacles preventing their achievement. I refer in particular to housing benefit. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said that landlords—I am not sure whether he referred to "wicked" landlords but has perhaps done so on other occasions—were "ripping off" the housing benefit system. I do not believe that the blame rests exclusively with landlords. The housing benefit system does not operate as well as it might for two reasons. First, landlords and tenants cannot generally risk signing a contract until housing benefit is confirmed. Conversely, housing benefit officials often will not confirm the availability of housing benefit until the landlord and tenant have signed a contract. That is a Catch-22 situation which it should be possible to sort out. Again, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that problem.

My second point relates to the attitude adopted by the hon. Member for Withington. Sometimes landlords provide accommodation for people in receipt of housing benefit only to discover part way through the tenancy that the eligibility for housing benefit has ceased. The landlord has no means of knowing that until he is asked by the housing benefit office to refund some of the money paid on behalf of the tenant who is no longer eligible. That is a quick and sure way of discouraging landlords from offering accommodation to recipients of housing benefit. The procedure needs tightening up; if it is not improved people will fail to find accommodation that they need.

Finally, I urge the Minister to take another look at circular 7/91 published on 10 May, in which he announed his intention to allow public subsidy to go into shared ownership schemes even when there is some restriction on the availability of staircasing. Before the circular was issued the right to full staircasing was a strict requirement but the circular modified that requirement. The message coming from the Housing Corporation seems to contradict the contents of the circular—a matter of particular concern to people in rural areas. I urge my hon. Friend to tidy up this incompatibility.

6.1 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I believe that everyone should have the right to a decent and affordable home. It is a national disgrace that in 1991 thousands of people are sleeping on our streets, hundreds of thousands are registered as homeless and countless more are living in cramped and unhealthy accommodation.

I accept that far more people now own their homes, but I cannot accept the cost at which that has been achieved. Government ideology, Government policy and the legislative changes of the past decade are major contributory factors to the appalling state of the nation's housing stock. Britain's housing is in crisis. The immediate response should be the removal of restrictions on local government finance to allow the greater use of capital receipts for new build, maintenance and improvement. But that is not the whole answer, since many local authorities do not have large capital receipts or stocks of housing to sell.

I should like some of the £23 billion that the Treasury has pocketed from the sale of council houses in the past 10 years to be reinvested in the housing market. Any Administration under our control would want substantially to increase direct public support for housing for people, however low their incomes. Our aim is to allow people maximum choice in how they house themselves and to gain maximum value for every pound of public money that we spend. This can be achieved by stimulating new investment to meet housing needs, by increasing the total amount of subsidy available and by dispensing it in a way that matches resources more closely to needs.

We need to increase the money available for housing associations and local authorities to build, acquire, improve and maintain housing so as to provide for people on low incomes.

We should introduce partnership housing, using a new and limited form of subsidy to enable a serious gap in the housing market to be filled—housing for people on middle incomes who for one reason or another prefer renting to buying. Measures such as these would need a new form of support, which we suggest would come from a housing cost relief, which will have the effect of making high rents more affordable and of enabling more people to cope with the difficult early years of buying a home.

We hear a great deal about affordable housing, but what does it mean? What is affordable rented housing? There can be no precise definition of an affordable rent; each household has different incomes, needs, priorities and skills for coping with its budget. At the moment the country relies on housing benefit to implement affordable rents, but the steep withdrawal of that benefit with increasing income has a damaging effect on incentives for people on low incomes to increase their earnings.

Ideally we should like a tax and social security system that shifts so much of the burden away from the low-paid that they can without hardship make a bigger contribution to their housing costs—

Mr. Gregory *rose*——

Mr. Fearn: I have no time to give way.

We recognise that there would still be a need for a closely targeted housing benefit system, but we think that targeting could be less severe than it is now. Even a modest rate of withdrawal, at between 65p and 55p in the pound, should make life easier for many people.

The pressures of the past 12 years have been in the direction of home ownership and the right to buy, but many people on average incomes would prefer to rent if rented accommodation were available and affordable. With the housing market in its present condition I understand that there is a discernible move away from buying and into renting.

We see our proposals for housing cost relief and partnership housing as the only reasonable and economic way forward to encourage new housing for rent. Housing

[Mr. Fearn]

cost relief would differ from housing benefit in three ways. It would apply to rent and mortgage payments above a certain level, say, £30 a week, and up to a ceiling of, say, £100 a week, with regional variations. It would cover only a proportion, perhaps 50 per cent., of the rent or the mortgage interest. The rate of withdrawal with increases in income would be gentle—probably about 20p in the pound. The threshold above which relief would be withdrawn would stand at about the median level of net income for a single earner: at the moment, about £150 a week.

The introduction of such a housing cost relief would make possible the introduction of a new rented housing sector based on a lower subsidy than that applied to the provision of housing for low-income households. We call this new sector partnership housing. It would be based on a capital subsidy that would depend on market conditions of house prices relative to income. The level of subsidy would fall as land and house prices fell relative to income. The rent on a home costing £75,000 would be about £80 a week. Housing cost relief would reduce the cost to the tenant by up to £25 to a minimum of £55 a week. By this method we think that as many as 50 per cent. more dwellings could be provided through a partnership housing scheme, for a given amount of public spending.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fearn: I have not given way so far, and I will not now.

Thus far I have spoken only about homes for rent, but if we are true to our aims of maximising choice the option to buy a home must extend down the income scale. The right-to-buy policy has made that possible for some, but it applies only to people living in council housing and we are well aware that the supply of stock is dwindling. Housing cost relief will give people on modest incomes about twice as much help as they would receive from mortgage tax relief, which is a less effective way of helping people. Indeed, I believe that many of the parties in the House are thinking again about it.

The ceiling of £30,000 is half the cost of an average home and because of its across-the-board nature it does not target public money where it is most needed.

Another scheme with the potential to help people on modest incomes to buy their homes is shared ownership. We welcome the arrangements for that brought in by the Government—they are not dissimilar to our partnership housing proposals. Our system of housing cost relief will offer a great deal of help and make shared ownership possible for a wider range of people.

The provision of housing will mean little if that housing is of poor quality or if it is not maintained adequately. Investment in maintenance and repair is essential, and it makes economic and social sense to ensure that there are enough funds to maintain the existing stock. To allow property to fall into disrepair and rack and ruin merely adds to the housing and homeless crises.

The erosion of local authority responsibility for building control must have a detrimental effect and has caused hardship to many home buyers. Full responsibility for the inspection and approval of building works should be restored to local authorities. There must be a review of all aspects of building regulations and codes of practice with a view to improving the long-term durability of construction and economy in the use of energy.

We would promote the standards that are recommended in "Homes for the Future", which was published jointly by the Institute of Housing and the Royal Institute of British Architects, and would consider legislative backing for the essential standards in that document. I favour legislation to widen the definition of unfitness. That is relevant to the private rented sector in which conditions are often appalling. People who rent in the private sector are entitled to decent, good-quality accommodation.

In 1989, we said that we would encourage local authorities to take the initiative in developing agency schemes to help improve and maintain privately owned housing stock. We have been pleased with developments since then at national and local level, although we share doubts as to whether the £3 million allocated by the Government is enough to keep those agencies going. While we welcome the funds allocated to inner-city projects for improving estates, we would like to see all councils being able to improve the quality of life on their estates and, where necessary, being able to redevelop.

Another issue requiring attention is the number of empty properties under local government control. When waiting lists are long, that should not be tolerated. Many of the properties are empty because councils do not have the money to bring them up to standard. Others are empty because of mismanagement and inefficiency. Councils must find ways to turn over property between lettings at a much quicker rate. One way may be to involve the tenants, and I was pleased to hear the Minister speak about that. Tenants could carry out redecorating and minor repair work. More funds should be provided to enable local authorities to bring empty properties back on to the rent market, and a relaxation of capital controls could provide some such funds.

We advocate a regular analysis of repairs that are required and those that have been carried out, and we want to see regular monitoring of performance with contractors expected to reach high standards of tenant satisfaction. For example, the Liberal Democrat-controlled council of Berwick has a four-year rolling programme for repairs using a number of small agencies. The condition of the council's stock and the efficiency of its programme was recently given an excellent report by the Audit Commission. Our councils are committed to tackling the deterioration in the private sector by running an efficient improvement grant system and by working with agencies and the voluntary sector to ensure that those in most need are getting the assistance that they require.

The Government's improvement grant means test is far too restrictive, and we should like to see it removed for the disabled and the elderly. The elderly are particularly relevant because they disproportionately have homes which lack basic amenities and they cannot afford repair and maintenance.

There is an obvious need for more direct investment of public money in the grants system. That would be imperative if the definition of unfitness were broadened and standards were strictly enforced. Enforcement is rather lax at the moment. However, when providing direct funding we must look at other ways of providing incentives to save and repair.

Private sector tenants who do not have a repair obligation in their contracts are, of course, not entitled to

an improvement grant, yet the private rented sector contains some of the worst disrepair. We should tackle that by giving tenants the right, with local authority approval for works and cost, to call in contractors to carry out essential repairs. In that context I am sure that there is a role for agencies. The local authority would be responsible for payment in the first place, but would be entitled to register a land charge against the property until the cost had been paid. When the repairs had been completed the landlord would be entitled to a rent increase, but that would be paid to the council until the debt was discharged. We expect that most tenants would have the extra rent increase largely covered by housing benefit.

Local authorities should have a statutory duty to ensure that housing, public health and fire regulations are observed in all multiple occupation premises and that properties with three or more households sharing essential living accommodation should be registered with the local authority. Properties not up to standard should be priority targets for acquisition by councils, housing associations and co-operatives and, where appropriate, we would use compulsory purchase orders.

I spoke about empty Government properties, but there are more than 600,000 empty properties in the private sector. Thousands of people are sleeping rough or in inadequate, cramped accommodation and it is obscene that so many properties are allowed to lie empty and fall into disrepair. We are willing to find ways of giving owners greater incentives to bring their properties up to standard and back on to the market, but when a property is intentionally left vacant we are prepared to introduce a new mechanism by which local authorities can serve a notice of intention to let, with appropriate right of appeal. Then, if necessary, we will extend compulsory purchase powers to enable local authorities to buy private homes which, I repeat, are intentionally left vacant for a significant time.

I have outlined some of the policies that should have been put in place during the past 12 years. The disaster area of housing has gone on for far too long. It should be tackled now.

6.19 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I shall concentrate on housing action trusts, not because I want to, but because of the short time that is available. There is a proposed housing action trust in the borough of Waltham Forest in my constituency, and it is greatly welcomed. If the tenants vote in favour of the trust, it will cost about £160 million to £170 million, which is a considerable investment of public money. The trust would cover four estates in the borough: Chingford hall, Boundary road, Oliver close and Cathall.

Boundary road is in my constituency and all four estates share the same characteristics. They are 1960s designed and built tower blocks and they are horrendous. It is dreadful to think that they could ever have been conceived, and it is appalling that they were so badly built and have been disgracefully managed. Tower blocks breed unemployment, despair and misery, and the sooner that they are taken down the better. The only people who will regret their passing are the criminal fraternity, who engage in stripping stolen cars, and the owners of pit bull terriers. I do not know where those people will go when the blocks are demolished, but with any luck they will all make their way to Hammersmith. I am delighted to say that, if the housing action trust goes ahead, there will be tenants on the board, which will allow their voice to be heard. This is a great improvement over the housing action trust mark 1, which did not permit tenants any say in the running of their estates.

Safeguards are built in for the tenants on, for example, rents, which will be frozen while the housing action trust is in operation. Once the tenants have moved to their new homes, the new rents will be set at levels similar to those for comparable council properties. Moreover, tenants will have the right to choose their own landlord. Once they have moved into their new homes, under the housing action trust, if tenants wish to keep the local authority as landlord, then they have the right to do so. If, on the other hand, they choose to have a housing association as their landlord, or if they choose to set up a tenants' co-operative so that they can run their homes themselves, or if they wish to exercise their right to buy, all these options are open to them. There is no question of privatising these estates—a slanderous and disgraceful suggestion that has been made by such bodies as the Socialist Workers party. I urge the tenants to take no notice of what these people say.

There is no doubt but that this is the way forward. It is the way to deal with dreadful estates of this type. I hope that the tenants on such estates in the London borough of Waltham Forest will turn out in great numbers for the vote on 13 July. I hope that there will be a clear-cut, decisive vote.

6.21 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The mark of a civilised society is that it is one in which people can expect to be decently housed and clothed, to have enough to eat and to have access to health care and to education for their children. Our society fails many people in a number of these respects, but nowhere more so than in housing. Every Member of Parliament representing an inner-city area has thousands of cases of human misery, ill health and broken families—all caused by overcrowding and the impossibility of getting somewhere decent to live. Furthermore, it is a cause of racial conflict. The Government put the squeeze on local authorities and refuse to let them have money for council house building, and so communities turn against each other and fight for the meagre resources that are left. The worst part of it is the loss of hope and the depression that come from 10 years of being on the waiting list and seeing no chance of a solution.

Tower Hamlets is fairly typical of inner-city boroughs. It has over 1,000 families accepted as homeless. Many are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The money that goes on bed and breakfast represents millions of pounds down the drain because it provides no permanent solution. I have visited constituents in seedy bed-and-breakfast hotels in Paddington and Earl's Court. The conditions are appalling. In a room the size of a boxroom in an average semi-detached house, there are two beds, a mother and father and two children. There is no television or a fridge. There is a coffee table at which one person can eat while the others eat on their beds. The mother comes up a steep flight of stairs from a communal kitchen with one child in her arms and the other hanging off her skirts, carrying pots of boiling food. Not only are they in danger, but, as I know

[Ms. Mildred Gordon]

from my experience as a teacher, these children will have no chance of health development. A child needs a place to move, to run and to stretch so as to develop mentally and physically, and there is no room for them to do so. These families in bed-and-breakfast hotels are condemned to a nightmare.

According to the community charge office, Tower Hamlets has 4,000 empty and second homes, most in the private sector. In docklands 1,500 units—the minimum admitted by the London Docklands development corporation—are luxury homes that people cannot afford to buy. We need radical solutions. The right-to-buy money must be released and used to repair empty homes so that they can be used. All unused land in public ownership must be released so that prefabs can be put on it; then we could do something within months to accommodate the vast majority of homeless families. Privately owned homes that have been empty for years must be requisitioned and let by local authorities.

The right to buy helped many people to purchase their own homes, but it has reduced the condition of public sector housing stock. In London, one fifth of the housing stock has been sold, three quarters of it houses with gardens, because they are what everybody wants to live in. That leaves only 15 per cent. of council tenants in houses with gardens. Therefore, the worst stock is that left in municipal control.

In docklands, we had a great opportunity to solve the housing problems because vast areas of land were left unused. When so much land is left empty, it must be zoned so that a fair proportion of it goes for affordable housing. Instead, million of square feet of office space was built, half of which is empty, and millions more are to come although they are surplus to requirements. That is not the answer that we need, in Tower Hamlets or any other city centre.

Most people dream of owning their own homes, but for many that dream has turned sour and has become a nightmare in these days of unemployment and rising interest rates. People come to me in desperation. They have bought their homes, but they cannot pay service charges, or a big repair has to be carried out, and they do not have the money for it. Bow county court deals with more repossession cases than any other court in London. A single person needs an income of £21,000 and a family needs an income of £26,000 to be a first-time buyer. That is no answer in an area such as Tower Hamlets, one of the poorest in the country.

The sad evidence of the failure of the Government's policy of trying to put an end to council house building can be seen all round us in London—in the people living in the streets, in the crowded rooms of the seedy bed-and-breakfast hotels and in the queues of desperate people in the surgeries of every London Member of Parliament. As I have said many times, for my constituents and those in other urban areas, the only practical answer is more affordable housing built by municipal authorities. The Government can shake their head and proffer other methods, but that method took people out of the slums and gave them decent homes and it is the only one that will work in the future.

6.27 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) said about housing conditions in her constituency and other inner cities. I remind her of what a former Labour council leader said about his council, Liverpool. Mr. Keva Coombes said:

> "Tenants get an appalling service, and they know that. I think probably the fundamental cause is, frankly, we've put the interests of the providers of the service, the workforce, above the interests of the tenants."

How true that is of so many services provided in Liverpool.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister was not able to develop his thoughts on reviving the private rented sector. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will recall that he told me, in a written answer:

> "It is too early to assess the overall impact of the Act on private renting."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. *541*.]

He was referring there to the Housing Act 1988. He pointed to some hopeful signs, but we still have a long way to go before we have a revived private rented sector. In contrast, in West Germany nearly half all homes are privately rented. In this country, there are some 600,000 empty private sector homes, many of which could be used to house the homeless. Unfortunately, previous restrictions have deterred such use.

There are hopeful signs—for example, reports in the London borough of Islington published in October 1990 show that private landlords are renting up to 30 per cent. more homes than they were two years ago. But in my constituency and in other parts of the south-west, there is no substantial scope for reviving the private rented sector. We must look to local authorities, or more particularly housing associations, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary knows.

I note that my hon. Friend the Minister said earlier that the Government have reallocated capital away from areas with receipts to areas without receipts. I hope that the Government will constantly take into account local authorities' practice of keeping homes empty, not collecting the rent and not facilitating the sale of council homes. Hon. Members will recall that I have made those points before. For example, in most of the districts of the south-west, between 25 and 30 per cent. of council accommodation has been sold, whereas in parts of London less than 10 per cent. of a much larger council estate has been sold. I hope that the Government will not lean over backwards too far to help inner cities in that respect.

An unpublished study of the housing situation and the consequences of council sales in my constituency said:

> "Family houses are more attractive to potential buyers than flats . . . This has clear implications for the housing section of Taunton Deane, as it displays a clear lack of available family accommodation which will either have to be met through an increased building programme, or through private rented sector property and reveals a problem which has arisen not solely, but perhaps largely as a result of the depletion of the housing stock through the promotion of the Right To Buy."

I therefore welcome the suggestion made in a letter dated 24 April from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State about the capital finance system. He said:

> "We shall keep the workings of this system under review and I do not rule out changes at some time".

I reiterate that some flexibility in the administration of the system would be welcome not only to me but to a number of my hon. Friends who represent local authorities which have handled their assets well.

Finally, I wish to relate housing provision and home improvements to our present economic situation and to the needs in the coming year or so to try to revive that sector of our economy. The Building Employers Confederation, in which I declare an interest as an adviser —*[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) will recall, I advocated these views before I became involved with the organisation and I should continue to advocate them were I not involved. It makes this point:

"Housing output will have to be expanded in both the private and the public sectors, to meet market demand".

It also says:

"Capital receipts are an available source of funding for the Housing Corporation if Ministers do not wish local authorities to build. Now is a good time to get housing associations to increase output, because land and building prices are low and they can maximise 'bang for the buck'"—as builders call it—

"at present. Rules preventing local authorities using their own land to pay for more building work should be relaxed."

I note that when the economy was recovering from recession between 1981 and 1984 there was a significant increase in the amount of spending on home improvement grants. In the financial year 1981-82, £197 million was spent on home improvement grants. In 1983-84, when the economy was reviving, £911 million, nearly £1 billion, was spent on home improvement grants—a considerable increase at that time. I commend that to my hon. Friend the Minister. I know that he has recognised in correspondence with me the teething troubles in the system that was introduced last year and I hope that this opportunity will be taken to try to float that sector off the rocks on which it is at present.

There is also the problem in my constituency, and I think in others, too, of owner-occupied homes which are in some difficulty because of non-traditional build. In Taunton—in the Galmington area—there are Woolaway houses which were built just after the war. They are not facing significant problems in terms of repair, but they are facing problems with regard to resale. As my constituent Mrs. Keitch says:

"On the last sale the purchaser had an extensive structural survey carried out on the house which proved positive in confirming that it was well-constructed and well maintained, but the purchaser withdrew because of unfounded rumours and worries about resale problems."

I have corresponded with my hon. Friend the Minister about that and I hope that he will continue to attach importance to the problem which is causing blight in parts of my constituency and no doubt other constituencies, too. Widows or elderly people occupying such homes and wanting to move to smaller, more manageable properties would release substantial three and four-bedroom houses for families in my constituency and elsewhere who are in urgent need of such accommodation.

I commend my hon. Friend's policies and I commend these points of concern to his attention.

6.35 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): It is important when discussing housing to get away from the rhetoric of simply slagging off any Labour-controlled authority and blaming everything on municipalisation. We should remember that many Tory-controlled councils are public-sector landlords to many people. I also despair at Tory Members—one of whom I am glad to see returning to the Chamber, the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth)—who spend their time here whingeing about their Labour-controlled authorities and then write to them asking for special treatment for people whom they see at their surgeries. That is despicable.

It is important to remember that HIP allocations apply not simply to public sector schemes, but to new build, the modernisation of existing stock, the estate action programme allocation, statutory improvement grants, mortgages for council house buyers and support to housing associations.

My authority in Bradford, which is a pleasant mix of inner-city and rural areas, has seen a 75 per cent. reduction during the past 10 years in its HIP allocation. In 1990-91 we saw an increse in expenditure on bed and breakfast from £20,00 to £200,000. For the first time, Bradford had a long-term bed-and-breakfast accomodation problem on its hands. Last year, 2,300 people were assessed as priority homeless. Because of the loss of housing stock during the past 12 years we were able to house only 975 of them and 1,200 people were left in bed-and-breakfast accommmodation. In addition, more than 4,000 families are trapped in flats waiting for houses that they cannot have because the majority of houses have been sold.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) said, bad housing affects education. We all know that substantial research has been done which shows that one of the major influences on children's educational achievement is their environment. Stress caused by poor accommodation leads to family break-up which in turn means that two units of accommodation are needed, adding to the problem. Such stress in turn makes demands on the health service. For far too long, the indirect consequences of the Government's housing strategy and the costs associated with it in other areas have never been brought together.

Because of the ludicrous housing subsidy rules, we now have the poor subsidising the poor. In 1990, £8 million in housing subsidy was lost from the housing revenue account. This year that figure has risen to £10 million. That has produced a rent increase of £6·20 which means that housing benefit must be increased—a rising spiral in subsidy.

In Bradford we have seen the rise of disreputable second mortgage companies which will advance money at extortionate rates of interest. At the first failure to pay they will go to the county court for a possession order.

Last week, one of my constituents came to see me. She may have been foolish, but never mind that. She had taken out a second mortgage to the value of £19,000 and—having, perhaps, taken less than the best legal advice—had signed a document that would lead to her losing her home three years later. Meanwhile, her debt stands at £31,000. That is the legacy of the 1990s, when the present Government created the myth that it was possible to extract the equity from a property and thus dispense with all worries. Now all the chickens are coming home to roost.

I will say little about the building societies. By and large, they are well intentioned; they have been led up the garden path by the new powers that they have been given, and now want to turn themselves into banks. We all know what that means.

[Mr. Terry Rooney]

What, then, is the solution? Both the Minister and Opposition Members have talked about housing strategy. I only wish that there were a housing strategy. We need a strategy that recognises all tenures and all agencies, and makes no excuse for bad management by local authorities, building societies or private landlords.

We need a strategy that reflects market forces. Nine thousand people are on the waiting list in my local authority area, because they want low-cost public-sector housing. The market is there; when will supply match demand?

In the past 10 years, the number of housing starts in West Yorkshire has fallen from 20,000 a year—both public and private—to 8,000. An indirect consequence of that pattern, which has been repeated across the country, is the fact that some 250,000 construction workers are now on the dole.

We need that new strategy soon and we need similar strategies to deal with associated problems in, for instance, education and health.

The Minister said that far too many people lived in estates that had been designed by people who did not live in them, and would not want to. Let me tell him that far too many local authorities' housing policies are being determined by civil servants who live in London, and are acquainted only with London problems. They have no conception of life outside the metropolis, because they venture further afield only on overseas trips.

6.42 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Nothing in the debate has suggested that the Government appreciate the seriousness of the housing problem. Indeed, everything that we have heard suggests that they are as complacent as ever. If nothing that my hon. Friends have said has had the desired effect, I should perhaps remind the Government that housing investment in this country has collapsed from 6 or 7 per cent. of gross domestic product to about 2 per cent.—far lower than the proportion spent in any comparable European or western country. We see the evidence on our streets, and also in the many reports that reveal the current decay in our housing stock.

No one listening to the debate would gain the impression that the Government, or their supporters, were even aware of the reports by the Duke of Edinburgh, the Public Accounts Committee or the Select Committee on the Environment—or, indeed, of the report by the Association of District Councils, which seems to have had no impact on the Government, although the ADC is composed of their friends and supporters.

Listening to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), no one would think that there was a housing problem in his constituency; yet Conservative councillors from that borough have asked me to try to persuade the Government to allow them to use capital receipts to replace housing costs in rural areas. I have received similar representations from other parts of the country. The Government are clearly prepared to ignore not only the Opposition but outside bodies. When will they start to listen to their supporters, who have also spelt out the problems?

Mr. Gregory: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Soley: I would love to give way, but, if I did, I would be taking time away from the Minister. I have eight minutes and he has 10.

The Minister implied that the Labour party had killed off the private rented sector. In 1979, when the Conservative Government were elected on the basis of their promise to revive that sector, it represented 14 per cent. of the rented market; now it represents 7 per cent.

Mr. Summerson *rose*——

Mr. Soley: I shall not give way, unless I do so at the Minister's expense.

That market share is now declining further, except at the upper end of the market—and it is rising at that end only because house prices are currently frozen, and landlords are letting on a short-term basis. When the housing market starts to pick up again, those short lets will come to an end, and the housing problem will recur.

As the Duke of Edinburgh's report has pointed out —and as I have pointed out for many years—the private rented sector has declined because of our system of housing finance. Only at the margins is that decline connected with the Rent Acts—as evidence from Northern Ireland and, indeed, elsewhere will show anyone who cares to examine the details.

The Government have fallen back on another example —empty properties. As Labour has said for some time, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) has said tonight, when there is evidence that a landlord has not acted properly—whether that landlord is Labour or Tory, council or public housing association, or, indeed, private—we shall take steps to ensure that the property in question is transferred to a manager who can manage it, in the private sector if necessary.

Let me remind the Government, however, that 16 per cent. of their houses—35,000 properties—are empty. If they have read the reports of the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on the Environment, they will know that only 2·5 per cent. of local authority houses are empty. Even authorities with larger housing stocks usually have special reasons. Where that does not apply, I would suggest transfer.

I shall issue a challenge to the Minister, which he may wish to meet when he replies to the debate. In the Government sector, 35,000 properties are empty—and I emphasise that most are not needed for defence purposes. One in five London police houses are empty; prison officers' houses have been left empty for up to 10 years. In Archway, Department of Transport properties are even now being auctioned off, while many Ministry of Defence houses are being kept empty for sale by auction. I challenge the Government to transfer those properties, here and now, to housing associations or local authorities. It is a question of, "Do it now—don't talk."

Let me tell the Minister what really happened about housing action trusts. I understand why he does not know: historically, housing Ministers in the present Government have lasted for an average of six months. The present Minister was not involved at the time; I give him full credit for that. If he had been, he would not have said what he did say.

In the Committee stage of the Housing Bill 1988, we argued against housing action trusts. We said that tenants would not be forced out of the council sector; we also saw problems involving rent-setting mechanisms and so forth.

Every one of the seven housing action trust areas identified by the Government voted them down. As a result of that pressure, and as a result of my taking groups of Members of Parliament to see the then Minister—the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier)—the Government began to shift their position. Now they are saying that tenants can go back to the council sector.

Given that the tenants who voted the system down in the seven areas identified by the Government were not offered the special and favourable deals that are now being offered to Hull and Walthamstow, which I welcome, will the Minister now make the same offer to those tenants? They knew that they would be transferred. Furthermore, is he prepared to change the law, which, as it stands, is not commensurate with his offer?

Let me say to the Minister what I have said to the Hull authority—I said it some time ago, and it is in writing. Those tenants will have the right to go back to either the local authority or another landlord of their own choosing; they need not go back to the local authority.

Then there is the question of housing authorities. It is wonderful, is it not? Various hon. Members are falling in love with the housing association movement: terrific. I wish that it had been so throughout the 1980s, when the housing associations grant was cut time and again. Now they are only just getting back to where they were in the 1970s. What a damning indictment of the Government's policy.

What else are the Government doing? One Minister —he is now Secretary of State for Health—promised to revive the co-ops. This year, the co-ops have had the lowest-ever allocation from the Housing Corporation—just 300 housing units. What a disastrous, incompetent measure.

Let me make two points about ending transfers—and I address this to the hon. Member for Gloucester as well as to the Government. Can we have a guarantee that, whenever tenants are transferred, they will be given the money to take independent advice about the desirability of the deal? Some tenants have bought a pig in a poke. An example of that—it was not badly intentioned—is the Greater London council seaside homes where tenants ended up paying more than they were told that they would have to pay. It was the fault of the housing association in that it got its sums wrong, but that was not surprising in view of the circumstances of the deal. Those involved were not offered independent advice which might have warned them off. No one should be transferred without independent advice.

I could make a success of a transfer if I were told that I could buy each unit for under £10,000, which is the maximum price for any house or flat in any total stock transfer that has taken place in Britain. Any fool could make a success of that. If one writes off all the debt, things can be improved. If it is such a good thing, why not do it for local authorities? The Minister says that we cannot have the capital receipts. He wants to do the equivalent of going home at night, finding that the roof is leaking and telling his family, "I am sorry, the roof needs to be repaired but we should pay off the mortgage." It is lunacy to use the money from capital receipts to pay off debts when there are so many homeless. It is also wicked. Therefore, the Government cannot use that excuse either.

There is a campaign for rough sleepers. Homelessness is not just a London problem and it is nowhere near being solved. I welcome the units that the Government have made available, but more homeless people will come to use them. They will come from Gloucester, Taunton, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. People will come from all over the place and the homelessness problem will continue to increase because, as the Duke of Edinburgh said, we have lost 1·9 million properties from the rented sector. The aggressive begging comes from the Government, begging for an excuse for policies that have failed the nation.

6.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): This has been an instructive debate on an important subject, and I welcome some of the contributions, including the eloquent plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) for a housing action trust there. I hope that the tenants will take careful note of what he said. I was interested in the suggestions of my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) for encouraging voluntary transfer. I shall draw the attention of the Department of Social Security to his remarks on housing benefit. I should like him to clarify his concerns about the Housing Corporation's attitude to circular 7/91. Perhaps he will do so in a letter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) made some powerful remarks about the revival of the private sector, the use of capital receipts and defective housing in his constituency. Almost all the other speeches were pleas for more money to be spent on council housing. Opposition Members ignored entirely the enormous resources that the Government are putting into the housing association movement. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) is a former employee of Manchester city council. Before he asks the Government to put more taxpayers' money into that city, he should do something about collecting the £15 million of rent arrears which were outstanding at the end of 1990. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) should ask why Tower Hamlets council had 1,758 empty council properties at 1 April 1990. Those were council properties built for council tenants. They were not built for policemen or hospital workers or for soldiers returning from abroad. They were meant for tenants and should be for tenants. They would be used by tenants if the Labour-controlled local authority did something about it.

The debate has reminded the House how the Government's policies over the past 12 years have given Britain more and better housing than at any time in history. The policies have been based on expanding home ownership, which is the preferred choice of the vast majority of families and individuals. Home ownership is now at record levels and is expanding still further with the promotion of shared ownership schemes and other intiatives designed to bring owner-occupation within the reach of those for whom it was previously impossible.

The Government's policies are also designed to improve choice and opportunity for tenants. They give all tenants more say in their own affairs. They target more resources where they are most needed and encourage the private landlord to play a bigger role in housing the homeless. The private landlord will have listened with interest to the reply of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). The hon. Member for Dagenham refused to say that the Labour party would

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

abandon its crazy policy of giving private tenants the right to buy. If ever there was a sure way of ensuring that the private rented sector remained largely dormant, it was that threat of confiscation.

The debate has also provided an opportunity for my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to mention the hugely increased resources that we are putting into housing associations via the Housing Corporation and by making it possible for housing associations to tap private finance for the benefit of tenants. All those positive steps have been resisted in one way or another by the Labour party's dogged determination to continue living in the past. For example, the rents-to-mortgages experiment is now successfully under way in Basildon and Milton Keynes. That initiative manages to promote home ownership and extend the rights of tenants. It is sad but not surprising that no Labour Member today had a word to say in favour of that scheme. As it took so many years of proven Conservative success and overwhelming tenant enthusiasm before the Labour party replaced its obstinate hostility to the right to buy with its present grudging acceptance, it will be many more years before it gives the rents-to-mortgages scheme an unqualified endorsement.

The debate also reminded the House of what the Labour party would inflict on tenants and landlords if it ever got the chance. We have had the usual hostility to the private landlord, thinly disguised inside the Labour party's so-called new agenda for the private rented sector. That agenda has been drawn up carefully to prevent private landlords from providing for poorer tenants. The initiative of my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, the pilot scheme under which housing associations are invited to bid for an opportunity to manage private property on behalf of landlords and to act as an intermediary between them and homeless families, is worth while. It would have done the Labour party some good if it had thought to give that a favourable mention.

The trouble is that at the core of the Labour party's policy is a deep-seated desire to meet every housing need by throwing huge sums of money at local authorities. The Government utterly reject that approach. Never again should tenants face the dreary monopoly of no alternative to a local council landlord. It was the excessive dependence on local authorities as the monopoly provider of subsidised housing which led directly to the dreadful conditions still found on many council estates today. That policy was utterly rejected by the Government but is still supported by the Opposition. It has given us more than 5,000 empty houses in Labour-controlled Manchester—more than one property in 20 of the total council stock. That same policy left more than £26 million of uncollected rent from tenants in Labour-controlled Southwark, almost one third of the annual rent roll.

Labour councils cannot be bothered to collect the rents that would pay for the improvements and maintenance that we want tenants to receive, but the Labour leadership is certainly not slow in promising to spend huge sums of taxpayers' money. Exactly how much it would spend remains shrouded in some obscurity. The promises that fall glibly from the lips of the hon. Member for Dagenham may not have been approved by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). When she was confronted with the ghastly reality that Labour's spending commitments would require a basic rate of tax of 40p in the pound, the hon. Member for Derby, South back-pedalled furiously. The hon. Member for Dagenham told the House last year that a Labour Government would immediately set in train a scheme costing £1·85 billion as a solution to the homelessness problem. Was that commitment cleared with the hon. Member for Derby, South?

Later in the year the hon. Member for Dagenham was at it again. He told the *Chartered Builder* magazine that over £8 billion was promised for construction, repair and maintenance. I doubt whether that was cleared with the hon. Member for Derby, South. Perhaps she is not such an avid reader of that magazine as I am. When we talk of £1·85 billion here and £3 billion there, we are talking about real money. Those spending pledges are either a hollow and cynical sham designed to buy votes from every pressure group that presents itself on Labour's door, or they represent a clear and unambiguous threat to every taxpayer in the country—an attempt to cripple taxpayers and wreck the economy.

Liverpool is a supreme example of what Labour rule can do to a once proud and prosperous city. Of all the disasters caused by Labour's administration in Liverpool, its housing is supremely disgraceful. There are over 5,000 empty council properties—one in every 12 owned by the council. That is the worst record of any local authority in the country. There is £16 million of uncollected rent—more than a quarter of the total rent roll.

However, hope exists for Liverpool's beleaguered tenants in the form of a housing action trust. Last week the city council voted to start negotiations. I warmly welcome that change of heart, but does the Labour party? Is it still firmly opposed to housing action trusts? Will it threaten Liverpool council as it threatened Hull council with the winding up of a housing action trust before it has even had a chance to get under way?

On this crucial issue of housing action trusts, the Labour party leadership in Parliament is opposed to its whizzo new moderate Liverpool city council. So deep and rigid is the attachment of the Labour Front Bench to out-of-date dogma that it cannot utter a word in support of its councillors in Liverpool, who are belatedly attempting to redress some of the wrongs that were inflicted on them in the early 1980s.

A year ago tomorrow, the House debated a Labour motion on housing. In that year, Labour has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The same touchstones have been uncovered—a slavish and unquestioning enthusiasm for the local authority monopoly landlord, the same profound hostility to extensions of tenants' rights, the same resolute determination to stop the growth in the private sector. Those were the solutions of the 1960s. They were mistakes then; they are irrelevant now. The House should reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 276.

Division No. 197] **[at 7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Ashton, Joe
Allen, Graham	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Alton, David	Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Battle, John

Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Martyn Jones, and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the policies being pursued by Her Majesty's Government to put a decent home within the reach of every family by promoting owner occupation, by securing greater private sector investment in housing and by directing public expenditure effectively towards those people and areas that most need support.

Electricity and Gas Industries

7.13 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the abject failure of the Government to prevent unrestrained increases in the profits of the gas and electricity companies and in the pay and perks of their Directors; notes that these profits, which are being achieved at the expense of the customers, damage the long-term interests of the country and result from policies which promote energy sales rather than energy saving, harm the environment, add to the trade deficit and reduce investment in research and development; and calls upon the Government to introduce effective measures to protect the interests of customers and to use its powers as a major shareholder in National Power and PowerGen to block those policies which the Prime Minister has said he deplores.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dobson: The past few months have exposed the Government's electricity privatisation for the squalid racket that it has become. It is a racket that has been conducted at the expense of taxpayers and of customers. I remind Conservative Members that the electricity companies' assets were built up from the bills paid by customers, yet they were sold off at a fraction of their real value. According to the books, those assets were worth £29 billion, but they were sold for a little more than £12 billion. The Government say that they do not accept those figures and that the audited accounts count for nothing—the only real value of the companies was what the stock exchange would pay.

When the regional electricity companies were sold in December, the Government put the part-paid shares on the market at 100p each and, before the end of the day's trading, they were trading at 160p, a loss to the taxpayer of £1·2 billion in two and a half hours. No profligate Labour council can compare with that.

Nothing daunted, in February the Secretary of State put National Power and PowerGen on the market, again at 100p for a part-paid share. By the end of the first day's trading, the shares were trading at 137p—a loss to the taxpayer of another £0·4 million.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman is very concerned about losses to the taxpayer, but will he confirm that he stands by the pledge given by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to *The Times* on 14 September 1989 that dividends would be taken from taxpayers without any recompense? Is that what the hon. Gentleman calls loss to the taxpayer—confiscation by the state?

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman can do no better than quote from the Tory party brief, of which, as usual, I managed to get a copy from the photocopier, he should not bother us.

Mr. Nicholls: Yes or no?

Mr. Dobson: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should be breathalysed so that we can get some sense out of him.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Labour party policy has been quoted to the hon. Gentleman, who owes the House an explanation. Will he say yes or no?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us get on with the debate.

Mr. Dobson: I owe the House nothing; the hon. Gentleman owes us an apology.

According to the Government's own figures, and according to the figures in the *Financial Times*, by 14 June this year shares in the regional electricity companies, which had gone on the market at 100p each, had at some stage traded at more than 200p. Some have fallen back since, but the Government sold the regional companies at a valuation that they have given to me—and I accept their figures for the sake of argument—of £5·2 billion. By 14 June the stock market valuation had increased to £7·4 billion, an increase of 44 per cent. During the same period, the stock market had risen by only 16 per cent.

National Power and PowerGen were sold by the Government at a valuation of £2·2 billion. They are now worth £2·7 billion on the stock market, an increase of 22 per cent. During the same period, the stock market as a whole rose by only 2·7 per cent. Those increases were at the expense of the taxpayer and were the result of the gross incompetence of the Secretary of State and, even more so, of the expensive collection of advisers from the City who advised him on the sale. In total, he has spent more than £500 million on City advice and underwriters' fees during the electricity privatisation process. If anyone dismisses that as an inconsiderable sum, I remind them that it is approximately the same amount as Lloyd's lost last year and about which there was much moaning and gnashing of teeth in the City. Of course, there was no moaning and gnashing of teeth about this £500 million because the City received it—it did not lose it.

Last year, prices to the consumers of domestic electricity were increased at a rate that was intended to be higher than the rate of inflation. As a result of the Government's incompetence, inflation soared, so the prices were not as high as inflation. However, this year, once again, prices for the domestic customer have been increased at a rate higher than the general rate of inflation.

The profits that have been announced over the past few weeks have been dramatically higher than the estimates that the Government made as recently as December last year. In the case of South Western Electricity, the profits were 48 per cent. up on the Government's estimate of December last year. What has maddened people most are the directors' pay increases which are so large that they beggar description. Since privatisation, there have been cuts in staff and further cuts are proposed. There have been cuts in research and development, and massive further cuts are proposed. There have already been cuts in training and further reductions are proposed. Coal and gas imports are being proceeded with at a rate that is becoming increasingly damaging to the balance of payments. All round the country, people are receiving reports of increasing interruptions to electricity supply. It is clear to everyone that the system of regulation is totally feeble.

All that I have described is a far cry from what the Tories promised. In their White Paper of February 1988,

[Mr. Dobson]

they set out what they called "principles" governing electricity privatisation. In view of what has happened, the list looks like a sick joke. The first principle was

"Decisions . . . should be driven by the needs of the customer."

None of the customers who have written to me over the past few weeks has said that he needs the electricity bosses to get pay increases ranging from 50 per cent. to 200 per cent.

The White Paper went on to say:

"Competition is the best guarantee of customers' interests."

Perhaps the Tories should tell that to the domestic customers who still have to buy their electricity from a local monopoly because there is no competition for them and because only businesses can shop around.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest) *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: Business users have seen 15 per cent. reductions in the price of electricity to them, while domestic customers have seen their prices rise by more than 20 per cent.

Mr. Coombs: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I will not give way for the moment.

The White Paper went on to say:

"All who work in the industry should be offered a direct stake in their future, new career opportunities".

The words "new career opportunities" must ring strangely in the ears of the 8,000 people from the industry who will lose their jobs as a result of rationalisation. The words will ring even more rottenly in the ears of the scientists at the central electricity research laboratory, one of the leading electrical laboratories in the world, which National Power intends to close because it is not doing stuff that is of immediate benefit to the shareholders. People throughout the country are disgusted by the pay rises that the directors of the companies are giving themselves. As I have already said, there is a combination of greed and opportunity. The directors have supplied the greed and the Government have supplied the opportunity.

It is no use the Prime Minister heaping blame on the directors. The Cabinet authorised the increases and knew what would happen. It is no good the Cabinet pretending that it had nothing to do with the increases and washing its hands of the matter. It is as though Pontius Pilate were about to become the patron saint of the Tory party.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm to the House that, under the regulatory pricing formula, the salary increases about which he has spoken cannot be passed on to the consumer? They must be found out of operational efficiency.

Mr. Dobson: I must confess that it is not at all clear to me that that is the case. That is certainly not the response that the newspapers and the rest of the media have got when they have approached Professor Littlechild, the regulator.

In the Government's own prospectus for all the electricity companies, it is clearly stated that directors' pay will be

"increased to levels which are more appropriate to a private sector company."

In other words, the directors will get massive increases. The Cabinet must have known that when it approved the terms of the prospectus before the launch. It must have known when it approved the prospectus what had happened up to that point with salaries in British Telecom and British Gas. From when British Telecom was in public ownership until the point at which the Government approved the prospectus, the chairman's salary had risen by 550 per cent.—from £67,000 to £374,000. The salary of the chairman of British Gas, from when the industry was in public ownership until the point at which the prospectus was approved, had risen by 323 per cent.—from £68,000 to £220,000. Those facts must have been known to the Secretary of State and his colleagues when they approved the prospectus.

Ministers' knowledge would not have been based only on the experience of those companies. The Secretary of State was not satisfied with observing what had happened elsewhere. He sought advice from the City and, of course, the taxpayer had to pay for it. Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte advised him from 1989 until 1990 on salaries for the directors and senior executives of what were to become privately owned companies. I asked the Secretary of State to place that advice in the Library, but he refused today to do so because, he said, it was "confidential". I bet it is. If the advice was placed in the Library, it would reveal that the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister knew all about the increases that the Prime Minister now deplores. For the Prime Minister to deplore in public what he has approved in private is sheer humbug. To do so on television is mega-humbug. It is no good for Tory Members to moan on about the increases and to say that they are shameful, extreme and should not have gone ahead. They voted for the privatisation and they knew what was happening because they knew, as well as I or any of my hon. Friends did, what had happened in the other privatised industries. It is too late for them to claim that they did not know.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Which would the hon. Gentleman prefer—high salaries for chief executives and prices going down in real terms or low salaries for chief executives and prices going up in real terms, as happened under Labour?

Mr. Dobson: Over the period in question, both gas and electricity prices have gone up in real terms, so the hon. Gentleman does not offer me a proper choice.

All the Tories here today, especially members of the Government, knew what was happening. If they genuinely deplore the increases, the question that arises is what they are going to do about them. The answer appears to be nothing. When the matter was first raised with the Prime Minister, he told the House that he condemned the increases. He said that the Government could do nothing about them, even at National Power and PowerGen, where they own 40 per cent. of the shares. He said that they had said that

"the Government had no intention of using their shareholding."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1991: Vol. 193, c. 856.]

That statement was not quite true and certainly was not the whole truth because the prospectus actually says:

"Her Majesty's Government does not intend to use its rights as an ordinary shareholder to intervene in the commercial decisions of National Power or PowerGen. It does not expect to vote its shareholdings on resolutions moved at general meetings although it retains the power to do so."

If the Government did not want the power to do so, they could have given up the power in the prospectus. It is no good their saying that that is not so.

Will the Secretary of State tell us whether, if another shareholder moves to block the increases at the annual general meeting, which I understand will be in September, the Government will sit on their hands? Will they show that their attitude to the increases is all words and no action? Will they perhaps remember that the people who are getting the increases are the very people who have benefited most from the massive income tax cuts at the higher levels over the past few years? Will the Government remember that they are the very people who, the Government think, should not pay national insurance on their income above £20,000? Will they think about that before deciding what to do at the annual general meeting?

Other people—admittedly, not many Conservative Members—claim that the increases are justified on the ground that they are the rate for the job. If the rate for the job of chief executive of PowerGen and National Power was right at £75,000 last year, how can it be right at £200,000 this year? These are not new and better people who have been specially recruited; it is the same old lot getting twice the money.

Sir Graham Day, the chairman of PowerGen, says that the increases are morally justified, but he is scarcely an objective judge. He has been a director of no fewer than four privatised companies. He has been chairman of three privatised companies and is still chairman of two of them. From his point of view, privatisation appears to be a game of musical chairs; every time the music stops he is sitting in the chair. In addition to being chairman of Cadbury Schweppes, of PowerGen and of the Rover Group and a director of British Aerospace, he is—God help us—on the national health service policy board. He believes that the increases are justified. No doubt he tells that to the nurses.

In an interview in the *Daily Express* in 1988—I always like people to give interviews to the *Daily Express*—Sir Graham said what he looked for in a good employee. No doubt he found it in Mr. Ed Wallis, the chief executive of PowerGen. He said that it is

"somebody who also tries to give a little more than he is paid for."

At £200,000 a year, Ed Wallis will have his work cut out satisfying Graham Day.

The directors of National Power and PowerGen, who have pocketed enormous increases, are responsible for running only two of the four companies that were created from the old Central Electricity Generating Board. The other companies are the National Grid Company and Nuclear Electric. Not only are those directors paying themselves more, but there are more directors. In 1988-89, the CEGB, running all four functions, had only 10 directors. At the latest count—it keeps increasing—the four successor companies had no fewer than 41 directors. In 1988-89, the CEGB's 10 directors, poor devils, managed on joint pay of £646,000. I have not been able to obtain the figures for the board members of Nuclear Electric, but before the new increases the directors of the other three companies that resulted from the break-up of the CEGB —National Power, PowerGen and the grid company— were getting £2 million between them, and I expect that after the current round of increases that total will rise to between £4 million and £5 million.

At the same time, those directors are urging pay restraint on staff and are keeping the staff's pay increases down to less than 10 per cent. Many of the staff will find that galling. The employees of East Midlands Electricity will find it particularly galling. Hon. Members will recall the blizzards in the east midlands, when those staff performed heroically in dreadful, cold, vile conditions to restore the supply. Their pay increases will be kept below 10 per cent., but the directors, who sat in their warm, air-conditioned offices will award themselves about 50 per cent.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Warm and air-conditioned? Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No. If the hon. Gentleman cannot make a decent joke from a sedentary position, I am damned if I will let him stand up to do it.

The other regional companies all say that these big salary increases are justified because their profits have increased. When one asks why their profits have increased, they say that it is because the cost of coal has fallen and because they had higher sales in a bad winter. Those are the economics of the madhouse: a director is paid more because of bad weather. We have heard much about cold weather payments, but the idea of somebody doubling his salary as a cold weather payment is preposterous. With all this interest in the weather, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can see why PowerGen is sponsoring the weather forecast.

We can expect every regional electricity company to increase top salaries by about 50 per cent. Compared with the enormous increases of National Power and PowerGen, a 50 per cent. increase is beginning to seem moderate, but it will not seem so to the 6 million pensioners and poor families who cannot afford to keep warm in winter—even in an average winter—because gas and electricity cost too much. It will not seem reasonable to the growing number of people who are out of work, to people in the private sector who are taking pay cuts to help keep their firms afloat, to people whose homes are being repossesed because they cannot pay their mortgage or to people who cannot pay massively increased rents.

The salary of the chairman of British Gas has increased by 66 per cent. from £220,000 to £370,000. Last year, gas prices increased by 14 per cent. and profits and directors' pay increased. It would appear that the attitude of the bosses of British Gas to customers is "Pay up and shut up." They seem to have changed the motto from "Tell Sid" to "Sod Sid".

Who will stick up for the customer? I hope that the Secretary of State will not say that it will be the Office of Electricity Regulation. This year, despite the falling cost of coal and other costs, OFFER nodded through domestic price increases of more than 10 per cent., despite the Government's target for inflation to fall to 5 or 6 per cent. That was a good increase for the electricity companies, but people tell me that it was not the regulator's fault. They say that poor Professor Littlechild had to accept the formula that the Government had given him and that OFFER had to accept the increases. If that is true, it seems to me, if I may use an elderly phrase, that the Government have set up an OFFER that cannot refuse.

What we want is an OFFER that can refuse. My doubts about the regulatory system are not confined to the system: I have doubts about Professor Littlechild, the regulator. His friends tell me that he invented the system that he is running, so he has something to answer for. From most of his public pronouncements and documents

[Mr. Dobson]

he seems to be more of an ideologue than a public servant. He seems to be one of those people, rather like Ministers, who recite the words "Competition is good for customers" and think that once they have said that everything is settled. The only problem is that competition has been good for moderate-sized business customers who have been able to shop around, but domestic customers cannot shop around and continue to be faced with a local monopoly that is shoving up its prices far quicker and higher than its costs.

The regulators for the electricity, gas, water and telecom industries are not working well enough and most people recognise that they need to be substantially improved. We have been promised improvements in the Prime Minister's citizens charter. If the documents leaked to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) are correct—they usually are—it does not appear that the citizens charter will strike fear into the hearts of the directors of those utilities.

I understand from other sources that the Department of Energy has said in the review that it does not want changes to be made because it is satisfied with the regulatory system already in place. All that I can say is that if it is satisfied with that, it will be satisfied with anything. Almost everybody in the country and in the business realises that there are things wrong with the regulatory system. It is far too feeble and is not doing the job that is necessary.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Clearly, the hon. Gentleman is convinced that his party will win the next general election. I hope that in the tail of his speech he will come to the Labour party's policy. I understand that part of that policy is to renationalise the grid. How much does the hon. Gentleman think that that will cost and how soon after the general election will it occur? Will he elucidate Labour party policy for us?

Mr. Dobson: I hope that if the hon. Gentleman waits a "page" or two he will be satisfied.

One of the problems about everybody's legitimate concern about top pay is that it has covered up many other developments which have been revealed in the interim results and which will damage the country and the customers. National Power has made it clear that it is about to make savage cuts in research and development spending. The central electricity research laboratories are threatened with closure. The company said in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) that it would no longer carry out research into what it described as national problems. If National Power will not carry out research on national problems, who will? If no one in this country does research on those major problems, the research that we——

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Is this another priority commitment?

Mr. Dobson: We now have someone apparently so cloth-eared that he can predict what we will say.

If the research is not done here, it will be done in Germany, Sweden, France and the United States, and we shall have to buy the equipment that we need from those countries instead of making it here.

National Power has also said that it wants to burn gas, whatever effect that may have on our limited gas reserves. The company recognises that those reserves are not enough, so it is already setting about importing more gas from Norway, whatever impact that may have on our balance of payments. National Power says that importing foreign coal is a "central plank" of its fuel strategy, whatever its impact may be on the balance of payments and on Britain's coal industry.

National Power has also said that it intends to burn orimulsion, which is undoubtedly the filthiest fuel in the world. Why will it do that? It will do all those things because they are in the short-term interests of the people running the company and in what those people believe to be the short-term, popular interests of the shareholders. That is their first and only consideration. They do not consider the long-term interests of customers or of this country.

We believe that privatisation is a shambles. We can amply demonstrate that it has damaged the interests of customers. It has outraged most people by the levels of pay given to its bosses. We do not believe that most people are satisfied with the profits accrued so rapidly—profits which are so much greater than those which the Secretary of State was responsible for predicting in December. We do not believe that the great experiment is succeeding, or that the electricity industry should have been subjected to a giant experiment. We believe that the people working in the industry deserve the minimum of change and disturbance, if they are to be allowed to do their work. We have said all along that we will bring the National Grid Company—*[Interruption.]*—back into public ownership. [HON. MEMBERS: "A priority."] It will be a high priority, I assure hon. Members.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman will give way to me, I shall continue.

We will bring the grid company back into public ownership and give it additional duties and powers. For a start, it will have a duty to maintain security of supply—a duty that no one has at present—and a duty to consider the impact of the industry on the balance of payments, on the environment and on our fuel reserves. We shall also change the rules for the regional electricity companies and oblige them under their licences to invest some of the profits in energy conservation and efficiency.

The system that the Government have established encourages more and more sales of electricity. Almost everyone apart from the Government recognises that energy saving, not energy sales, must be the priority for the future and that is the priority that the industry will have after the next general election, when we implement our policy.

Mr. Oppenheim: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for me to ask whether it is in order for the Labour Front-Bench spokesman to say that he would give the House an idea of how much it would cost to buy back the industry and then totally fail to do so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Let us get on with the debate.

7.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on continuing with its successful policy of privatising nationalised industries; notes the recent successful privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Great Britain; and welcomes the benefits that privatisation of the electricity and gas industries has brought and will bring to consumers, taxpayers and employees.".

It is less than six months since the House held a debate on electricity privatisation—at the Opposition's instigation—under the shadow of the then imminent Gulf War. The privatisation has now been completed with outstanding success.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has expressed great indignation about a great many related issues, which I will deal with in due course, without anywhere acknowledging or seeming to recognise that the points that he raises are dwarfed in importance by the continuing impact of privatisation, which is already serving the interests of customers, the taxpayer and employees far more effectively than any form of Government intervention.

Let me refer the House again to the principles underlying the privatisation of the gas and electricity industries, and the transformations that they have already brought about within the energy market.

First, for the customer, privatisation has introduced guaranteed standards of performance. Only yesterday, guaranteed standards for electricity were introduced. Offer —the Office of Electricity Regulation—has set standards for restoring supplies after faults, repairing company fuses, providing a meter and many other services. If those standards are not met, the electricity consumer is entitled to compensation. Domestic customers can get £10 if an appointment is not kept and £20 if supply is not restored on target. The regulator has made it clear that he will examine standards of service when he resets the price formulae.

For gas, the resetting of the price formula will shortly be accompanied by a package of standards of service. I expect those to include obtaining a supply, continuity of supply, meter reading, billing and appointments. The setting of those standards will be a significant step forward in customers' rights.

If customers are not served properly by privatised utilities, for the first time there is a proper means of independent redress. We have set up independent regulators. They have extensive powers to put matters right. If the existing terms of the licence are not strong enough, the regulators can refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. New, tougher licensing conditions can be created where they are needed.

Not only are standards of service set and guaranteed but prices are kept down by regulation.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The Secretary of State said that all this was happening for the first time. Will he take it from me that the East Midlands electricity board introduced guaranteed service standards, with refunds, back in 1985?

Mr. Wakeham: This is the first time that such standards have been set right across the industry, and the important point is that the regulators will be independent of the industries.

Since privatisation, domestic gas prices have fallen by 11 per cent. in real terms and standing charges by 20 per cent. in real terms. Price control provides a strong incentive to efficiency. It has been remarkably successful in producing efficiencies in gas supply which have enabled British Gas to increase its profits as well as to pass the benefit of real price reductions to the consumer. As a result, for the future, the price formula is being tightened still further. From next year, British Gas must meet the price target of RPI minus 5 rather than RPI minus 2. Restraining profits, as the Opposition's motion advocates, is a recipe for inefficiency.

Electricity prices for domestic consumers have fallen by about 2·5 per cent. in real terms over the past seven years. What a contrast to the position under Labour, when prices rose by 22 per cent. in real terms—up 2 per cent. every six weeks. In future, regulations will protect consumers from unjustifiable increases. For a three-year period, prices are regulated by reference to the retail prices index.

Mr. Burns: I have been listening carefully to my right hon. Friend, but may I check that I heard him aright? Did he really say that electricity prices for domestic users have fallen by 2·5 per cent. over the past seven years whereas under the Labour Government they increased by 22 per cent. in real terms, and that pensioners, the disabled, those on low incomes and the unemployed faced price increases in their electricity bills every six weeks?

Mr. Wakeham: That is correct. My hon. Friend is listening very carefully to what I am saying, and I am grateful to him for it.

Of course, competition is the best guarantee of customer service, efficiency and keen pricing, so we have taken steps to ensure that competition is introduced wherever possible in the electricity industry. Already competition is working for the customer. Thousands of industrial and commercial companies have had to pay lower prices for electricity. Professor Littlechild said in his director general's report for 1990 that some customers had achieved as much as 15 per cent. savings as a result of competition. Competition in generation will keep the costs of electricity down in the future as new generating projects come forward.

It would be nonsense to return to the days of nationalisation when Governments intervened in an arbitrary fashion, when customers had no real means of redress and when it was not even worth complaining. Now we have real incentives for efficiency and customer service. That is why the privatised industries are leading the way. That is why we want to extend such benefits to the public sector through the citizens charter.

Those are the benefits for the customer. For the taxpayer, the privatisation of the electricity industry will raise proceeds of more than £14 billion. The privatisation of gas raised proceeds of £8 billion. Given that the Labour party's policy proposals imply increases in public expenditure of some £35 billion, the proceeds from privatisation should not be dismissed by them in such cavalier fashion.

Growing profits brought about by efficiencies unlocked by privatisation, even at a time of falling real prices, mean greater tax receipts for the Treasury. It is nonsense to say that growing profits damage the long-term interests of the country; growing profits are needed to finance the requirements for capital investment to maintain and

[Mr. Wakeham]

expand the electricity and gas supply systems. In addition, the taxpayer is no longer left to finance a poor record of mismanaged investment in massive projects, not finished on time or to cost, and poor profitability.

Improving prospects, rising share prices, cost-cutting and greater efficiency in all the companies should be welcomed. They represent a clear gain to the nation in contrast to the old order of rising prices to consumers with no means of redress, and very little incentive for improved efficiency. Those were very real costs and burdens on the nation.

What are the benefits for employees? For the first time they are able to own a real stake in their industries. They were also able to participate directly in the benefits of the flotation itself. Ninety-eight per cent. of employees in the electricity industry took up shares. Four and a half years after privatisation, 87 per cent. of employees of British Gas hold shares in their company. Those employees have much to fear from the return of a Labour Government. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has made it clear that shareholders in privatised industries would be punished by a Labour Government.

For the future, under our policies employees can participate in the growing success and growth in their companies through share save schemes.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): What would the Secretary of State say to the 250 employees at a power station in my constituency who now face redundancy? What about their share in the industry? Their jobs have gone, and the few shares that they may have bought before they realised that there was a prospect of losing their jobs will not keep them for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Wakeham: Everyone is unhappy about anyone who is made redundant, in whichever part of the country it may be. A whole range of overmanning problems and inefficiencies existed and privatisation has been directed to try to improve matters. One regrets redundancies for whatever purpose. I know that the companies concerned are seeking to do what they have to do by voluntary means if at all possible, although that is strictly a matter for them.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On the same point, is the Secretary of State aware that, before the Electricity Bill was presented to the House, I asked his predecessor whether it was not clear that privatisation was liable to result in redundancies and a reduction in the size of the labour force in the electricity supply industry? The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor said in the House that, so far from there being redundancies, privatisation would lead to more employment in the industry. That hardly bears out the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson).

Mr. Wakeham: An efficient electricity industry producing low-cost electricity is an important factor in our industrial growth, and will certainly improve the number of jobs.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: My right hon. Friend rightly emphasised the improvements in efficiency, competitiveness and accountability that privatisation has brought with it. He also mentioned the benefits to the taxpayer as a result of privatisation proceeds. My right hon. Friend will have heard the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the shadow Secretary of State for Energy, say that a high priority of any future Labour Government would be to spend money on renationalising the national grid. Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity of asking the hon. Gentleman again what that would cost? Last week, Labour's spending policies were costed at an extra £35 billion—15p on the lowest rate of income tax—and renationalisation costs were not included in that. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras says that renationalisation is a high priority, so he should tell us what the effects of that policy would be.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in saying that the Labour party's proposals were costed at some £35 billion extra. That is worth repeating because it is important that people in Britain should know what the Labour party's policies imply. Moreover, that figure does not include the cost of renationalisations conducted under those policies. Having said that, I think that the most serious question about the renationalisation of the national grid is how the grid would operate in relation to the private sector part of the industry—the part that the Labour party does not intend to renationalise, if I understand its policies correctly. I think that we would find that many of the inefficiencies inherent in the old system would be brought back by the bureaucrats who would then be running the national grid. That is a serious matter.

In the past few years, the services offered by these privatised industries to customers have been transformed. There are now guaranteed standards of service, backed up through our regulatory regime by tough financial penalties for failure to meet them.

When Labour was in office, no such guarantees existed: customers were subjected to unaccountable, inefficient and unregulated monopolies. Little wonder, then, that disconnections for debt in both industries have plummeted to half the intolerable level we inherited from Labour.

On every count—prices, services, standards, disconnections, investment—the privatised record beats the nationalised record hands down. That is the background against which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has criticised the recently reported board pay levels.

Let me state clearly our policy on directors' pay. The Government's view is that salaries should be sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate. Most companies in the private sector have a remuneration committee consisting of non-executive directors. It is their task to determine the pay of the chief executive and senior directors.

The same now applies to the companies we have privatised. The current salary levels are a matter for those companies. Government approval was not sought—nor was it required.

The first point is that increasing directors' salaries has no effect on prices to consumers. The price formula is intended to exert downward pressure on costs. It does that by regulating prices without regard to any subsequent increase in costs which, like directors' salaries, are within the control of the company.

It is not for the Government to second-guess the views of the companies. But that does not mean we should not express a view about salary levels. We have done so. The Government believe that it is essential that pay at all levels reflects the economic facts of life and the importance of beating inflation. The rate at which salary levels for

directors in privatised companies move to private sector levels needs to be moderated to take this into account. Directors need to exercise both leadership and restraint.

Secondly, the salary levels are not out of line for companies of comparable size. The companies themselves have pointed out that British Gas ranks amongst the six largest and most profitable United Kingdom companies, whereas the chairman's basic salary ranks 38th in a survey of the United Kingdom's top companies. Similarly, PowerGen ranks 60th in the United Kingdom list of top companies and the chief executive's pay is ranked 97th.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): None of us wants to go in for spurious statistics. However, referring to the link that Sir Graham Day has made between the pay of the chief executive of PowerGen and that company's ranking in the FT100 index, does my right hon. Friend really accept the balderdash that running a privatised monopoly is as difficult as running an industry such as GKN or any other company that has to withstand the heat of the day and losing money? If we are arguing that the position of the privatised monopolies is the same as that of a company that has to earn its money the hard way, we are on hard and stony ground.

Mr. Wakeham: It is not for the Government to second-guess the salaries that companies pay—*[Interruption.]* I have expressed my views about some of the salary levels and the rate of increase and would simply add that it is not correct to say that PowerGen is a monopoly—

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It is 85 per cent. a monopoly.

Mr. Wakeham: It is nothing approaching that—it is more like 30 per cent. A good many other companies are in the business.

Mr. Dobson: I can understand why the right hon. Gentleman is saying that the Government do not want to second-guess the companies, but if that is of no consequence to the Government, why did they spend taxpayers' money on getting advice from Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte about the salaries that should be paid to those people?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman has not read the report and does not know what is in it, I do not know whether he knows that that is the position—

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Does the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not prepared to refer off the cuff to a report that I told the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras earlier that I was not prepared to reveal to the House.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): In two consecutive sentences the Secretary of State has said that he is unhappy about the increases that have been awarded—paradoxically, to the executive directors by the non-executive directors and to the non-executive directors by the executive directors; and that their relative pay was lower given their importance in the British industrial sector. That does not lead us to any clear conclusion. Is it his view that the increases should be reduced before the annual general meetings, and what is he going to do about it? The Chancellor invited the heads of the banks to see him because they were over-charging. Will the right hon. Gentleman invite the heads of the privatised industries to see him so that he can tell them to reduce their salaries?

Mr. Wakeham: The important point is that the salary increases—and it is the increases of which I disapprove—do not affect the price to the consumer—*[Interruption.]* That is an important point. It is absolutely right.

The purpose of privatising the industries was to allow the directors and shareholders to make those decisions. The public interest is protected by the regulator because of the price of the product. Therefore, it is not appropriate for the Government to intervene in such cases. We have no grounds on which to intervene in the case of the companies that are 100 per cent. privatised because we have no shares. We retain a 40 per cent. shareholding in National Power and PowerGen. We made our position quite clear in the prospectus. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras read it out correctly. I am amazed that he thinks that breaking our word would be a small matter. That view reflects more on a potential Labour Government than on anything else. The Government do not accept that it is a small matter to break our word.

Mr. Dobson: Just to clarify a point about the next Labour Government, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government's own prospectus makes it clear that, on entering Government, Her Majesty's Opposition intend to appoint directors and to exercise the powers of a 40 per cent. shareholder?

Mr. Wakeham: If that should ever arise, I strongly suggest that the hon. Gentleman takes legal advice on his powers as a shareholder and on the way in which he should operate. If he does, he will find that he has to operate within certain constraints. The hon. Gentleman would be well advised to consider such matters carefully.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak) *rose*——

Mr. Wakeham: I shall give way, but this will be the last time.

Mr. Hawkins: If the Government do not intend long term to exercise the shareholders' duties of restraint in such matters, should they not consider relinquishing their shares so that others can fulfil those duties and act as a restraint? There is something exceedingly curious about the British. When really high incomes are paid to pop singers, tennis players, top footballers and television presenters, that does not seem to worry the British; but as soon as somebody in industry starts to earn a high salary, there are screams and shouts of abuse. That is an odd priority for a nation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not the pay levels that are objectionable as much as the speed of the increases, their timing and the example that is being set to workers at a time when many other people are losing their jobs? Does he agree that the scale, timing and example are beyond belief?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend heard what I said, and what he has said is not very different—although I have not expressed any views about pop stars and tennis players.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the consumers' interest—we are here to represent the consumers, as we no longer run the companies—is better served when directors are paid a market salary, as they can now be paid under

[Mr. Michael Grylls]

privatisation, than was the case under nationalisation, when the salaries were set by Parliament so low that the best people could not be recruited?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only are the people not the same, but they are not doing the same job. Indeed, they are doing extremely different jobs and a number of them have been recruited in the market——

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford) *rose——*

Mr. Wakeham: I said that I had given way for the last time.

What is the Labour party's position on this matter? Its most recent policy review document, "Opportunity Britain", gives the distinct impression that the private sector has nothing to fear from the unlikely prospect of a Labour Government. It states that,

"more than ever before British industry now needs a long-term commitment from Government, but not in the form of indiscriminate subsidies or second guessing industry".

That was only three months ago, but, as we have seen today, those words are at best hollow and at worst totally misleading.

The reality of Labour's policy is distinctly different from the rhetoric, for what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has done today—in sharp contradiction of his party's policy statement—is to propose a series of policies precisely to second-guess successful British industries by seeking to control pay and profits and to interfere in the decisions of management.

Indeed, I wonder whether the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is aware of the line that the hon. Gentleman is taking. But, as is often the case, as soon as Labour's policy is challenged, it falls apart at the seams. Labour Members' policy on industry has not changed. They think they know better than industry how industry should be run, in spite of all the evidence since the second world war that that is not so.

That is true of the issue of pay, about which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made great play. On that subject, too, Labour's divided and muddled position lacks credibility. How would Labour Members seek to control pay? The answer is not clear. Their party leader believes that the trade unions can simply be persuaded to moderate their pay claims at the same time as a minimum wage is introduced.

"If you're a Government that acts in a way that stimulates the economy properly . . . the moderation of wage claims is something a Government can really ask for",

he says. But as the leader of one big union admitted, any idea that the unions could be so persuaded is "deranged".

The truth is that Labour's plans for a minimum wage would, at the same time as destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs, lead to a pay explosion throughout the economy. Labour would have no way of controlling it without resorting to the sort of statutory controls that failed dismally in the 1970s.

That is precisely what Labour offers—a return to the corporatism that should have died its death during the winter of discontent, a return to pay policies and credit controls and a return to the failures of nationalisation, red tape and bureaucratic interference. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras let the cat out of the bag. Labour has not changed, and never will.

Unlike our opponents, we believe in free enterprise and in the private sector. Our privatisation programme—now being copied throughout the world—has transformed vast sectors of British industry, bringing extensive benefits to customers, to the taxpayer and to the employees of those industries. Throughout the rest of the 1990s it will continue to do so.

I commend the amendment to the House.

8.13 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I am glad to have this opportunity to put a point to the Secretary of State that I would have raised had he given way to me a few moments ago. While he clearly disapproves of the colossal increases that members of senior management of the electricity companies have received, he defends those increases. Indeed, he spent several minutes of his speech defending them.

It is clear that the Secretary of State and his Department have become impotent in the dealings with privatised industries. That being so, one wonders why we need a Secretary of State for Energy. He spoke at length about the inefficiency of those industries when they were in the public sector. Is he suggesting that those who were running them at that time were inefficient because their salaries were fixed by Government? In other words, is he suggesting that they did not do their best in their jobs because they were not satisfied with their salaries?

Would the right hon. Gentleman suggest, for example, that Sir Walter Marshall was inefficient because he was dissatisfied with his salary? Has the right hon. Gentleman forgotten that Mr. Baker and Mr. Wallis were members of the teams who were running the so-called inefficient electricity industry of those days? Are we to believe that the new people, because of their much higher salaries, will work that much harder?

Either deliberately or inadvertently, the Secretary of State did not comment on what is likely to happen as a result of the decisions that are currently being made by the new, highly paid executives who are responsible to no one, not even to the right hon. Gentleman and his Department. Is he aware that those decisions will have a great bearing on the energy needs and supplies of the country? For example, their decisions will result in thousands of miners being thrown out of work and the sterilisation of millions of tonnes of British coal because British Coal is unable at present to meet foreign competition.

Mr. Baker, with his £200,000 a year salary, said recently that he intends to import 50 per cent. of the coal he needs. If that happens, our mining industry—as a result of decisions taken by people who are not democratically responsible to anyone—will be wiped out. Not only will thousands of jobs go, but, more importantly, our ability to meet our energy needs in the future will also disappear. Once our millions of tonnes of coal have been sterilised, that resource will never be retrieved.

After the medium term, perhaps after the longer term, we shall be at the mercy of supplies from abroad. For how long will their prices remain low? Supplies of gas and oil are finite and while we are using—in my view, wasting

—gas for the generation of electricity and sterilising our coal, we must consider what we shall do to meet our energy needs in the very long term.

In a few moments from now, contracts will probably be agreed between British Coal and the electricity supply industry. Those contracts will involve the use of much smaller tonnages of coal than are now being used. If that is so, the coal industry will be so run down that only a dozen pits and 10,000 to 12,000 men will be left. An industry of that size will never again be able to meet the demands of the electricity supply industry. Is that wise policy? The effect on the balance of payments will show that it cannot be wise policy but simply to meet short-term market fluctuations or political dogma.

The Government say that if—God forbid—they win the next election, which is unlikely, they will privatise the coal industry. I hope that the Minister will answer these questions seriously. Does the Secretary of State or any of his colleagues really believe that, once they have slaughtered and butchered the coal industry, right down to the decisions by Mr. Baker and Mr. Wallis, the industry will be saleable? If British Coal cannot meet competition and win contracts now, what chance has a small private coal industry? Who will want to buy it? That is the problem facing the Government.

I regret, and I believe that the country will live to regret, the decisions taken, simply on a commercial basis, to wipe out what this country has always been privileged to have —a major source of energy supplied by coal. The action to wipe out that energy supply is nothing short of criminal. I hope that the Government have at least some control or persuasive powers over the negotiations to take place shortly. I hope that they will be based not purely on commercial factors but on security of supply. That is a major aspect and if we do not bear that in mind the country will regret the day that the Government implemented that foolish policy.

8.22 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): This is another of Labour's groan and grumble half days. Give them a few headlines showing success by private industry and away we go with a whingeing and whining debate. It usually starts with the prospectus and launch of a newly privatised company. If the share price is right and the issue is successful, we hear cries of foul on the basis that the public has been denied the right return. If the issue flops because the share price has been set too high, we hear the same yells of derision. Luckily the Government have been so successful with their privatisations that the flops have not occurred. Labour Members cannot have it both ways.

The next stage of the groan and grumble campaign occurs when the new companies produce extremely satisfactory results at the end of their year's trading. Labour Members then squeal that the consumer is being ripped off. They would like to see poor results at the end of the first year so that they could point to the failure of privatisation.

The privatisation programme has brought higher standards from the private sector into the energy supply industry. The results show in improved profitability, lower prices in real terms and the introduction of competition. In the past five years, electricity and gas prices have fallen in real terms for industrial and domestic consumers. As my right hon. Friend said, what a contrast with Labour's record in the 1970s, when electricity prices rose by 2 per cent. every six weeks.

The Opposition motion refers to the Government paying more regard to the sale than the saving of energy. Although GDP has increased by 25 per cent. in real terms under this Government, energy consumption has remained virtually unchanged. Privatisation has put a downward pressure on prices under the regulatory regime and brought greater efficiency, greater flexibility in energy generation and greater consumer protection. For example, British Gas, which announced record profits of £1·3 billion despite bringing down gas tariff prices by some 14 per cent. in real terms since privatisation, has now brought gas costs down to about the lowest level in the whole of Europe.

Why has there been such a dramatic improvement? Since privatisation, British Gas has attracted a million new customers and productivity has leapt from 160 to 221 customers for each employee. Investment has dramatically increased. Last year, capital expenditure rose by over 50 per cent. to £1·2 billion. That amount was close to the total profits announced by that company and represents future security of supply for the British people.

The one element that has been lacking in the gas sector is competition, but a 90 per cent. limit has now been set on the sale of North sea gas to British Gas. It enables producers like Agas, BP, Mobil and Quadrant to supply gas to industrial customers in competition with British Gas. The role of Ofgas, the regulator of British Gas, has been steadily strengthened thanks to the diligence and perseverance of James McKinnon, its chairman. His new pricing structure means that domestic charges should fall by 5 per cent. a year over the next five years, with a further fall of 15 per cent. over the following five years. I look to Mr. McKinnon to devise a consumer repayment system on similar lines to those drawn up by the electricity regulator. He must also sort out the problem of the British Gas contract price increase of 30 per cent. for some of the United Kingdom's industrial users of gas, whom we want to enter electricity generation. I have great confidence in Mr. McKinnon and his ability to find a solution to that problem.

I am convinced that the electricity privatisation will be the biggest and most successful of all the Government's privatisations. The four new companies and 12 regional companies have all produced immensely popular flotations, followed by higher-than-expected profits in their first year. It is a success story and it should not be decried by the Labour party. Increased sales due to the colder spring and apprehension last year about the Gulf war have resulted in better-than-expected yields in the first year's profits. It is anticipated that, as the competiton in the electricity market hots up, with independent generators coming forward, downward pressure on prices will also increase.

It should be made clear that, under the price mechanism control written into the regime, the large pay increases that are causing such a stir cannot be passed on to the consumer. Consumers of electricity can benefit from a unique set of compensation payments available as from yesterday if the electricity companies fail to fulfil their obligations. They will receive £10 if an appointment on a specific day is broken; £20 if, within 24 hours of a fault occurring the supply is not restored; £20 if a meter is not supplied within five days of an order; and £10 if supply is

[Mr. John Hannam]

interrupted through the fault of the company and is not restored within four hours. Other compensation payments are also available.

All those measures add up to an era of increased protection for consumers of gas and electricity, a new and environmentally protective supply and use of energy, and a reduction in costs. I forecast that during the next decade the new companies will produce even better results. They will be reflected not necessarily in higher profits but in higher investment and lower prices.

As for the recent spate of huge salary increases in the newly privatised industry, I asked for information from the Library on the relative position of those salaries compared to the salaries of heads of similar sized companies. *The Guardian* list shows that they are obviously still on the low side.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) mentioned research going to Germany, so I asked for comparisons with equivalent chief executives abroad. Recently produced figures show that the executives in leading power generating companies in Germany still earn, on average, up to 50 per cent. more that Mr. Baker of National Power. The average pay of the seven-person executive body of the VEW generating plant in Dortmund is £213,000. In STEAG of Essen the average pay of the five-person executive body is £216,000; and the chief executive of Florida Power and Light in the United States earns £395,000. As *The Independent* quoted on 5 June

"British bosses lag in pay stakes despite big rises".

These examples give a slightly clearer picture of the pay levels of our chief executives than do the statements by the Opposition spokesman. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that in this time of recession the improvements in their salary levels should have been phased in over a longer period, but I expect that the same row would have erupted among the Opposition even if that had occurred.

I reject the Opposition motion, which shows that the Labour party still does not have much clue about the workings of industry. All that Opposition Members want to do is to try to score short-term party political points. I urge the House to reject the motion.

8.31 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): It is part of the survival plan of this Government to try to choose the moment of the next general election when their prospects of winning it are at their highest. That has involved them in trying to create an image that can be sold to the voters. Part of the image-making process has involved trying to persuade voters that the Tories can create a fairer Britain —an opportunity Britain, a phrase that they borrowed from somewhere else—and a Britain of decent public services and of equal citizens led by citizen John himself. The Prime Minister has even boasted that he will deliver what the communists have been struggling unsuccessfully to achieve for more than 100 years: the classless society.

We now know the sort of classless society that the Prime Minister had in mind. It is a society in which the bosses of the privatised industries, from National Power and PowerGen through British Telecom to British Gas, have awarded themselves five and six-figure salary increases—£50,000 here, £150,000 there and £160,000 in one case. Those are merely the increases in salary; the salaries themselves are much higher again—in the case of the chief executive of British Gas, £370,000 a year. We are expected to accept that these increases are fair, even though we know that these are the same men who have thrown thousands of their own workers on to the dole and told them to get by on £41·40 a week dole money and, if they cannot find a job within a year, on £39·65 income support. The Prime Minister, who claims to believe in the classless society, is the same Prime Minister who condones this sort of grotesque inequality and unfairness.

One of the excuses trotted out in defence of the privatised bosses' pay hikes is that the increases are necessary to raise the salaries to a level appropriate for a private sector company. On breakfast television this morning a spokesman for the Institute of Directors with all due solemnity assured anyone watching at that time of the morning that the average company director of a private sector company earns just £40,000 a year. He said that the sort of increases that the privatised bosses were awarding themselves were not typical of the private sector. So becoming a private sector company cannot in itself explain why at National Power the boss had to award himself £50,000 over and above the £85,000 that he was already receiving. Nor does it explain why the boss at PowerGen had to award himself another £124,000 over and above the £76,000 that he was already earning. It certainly does not explain the extra £150,000 awarded to the chief of British Gas, which was already a private company when he was earning £220,000 last year.

So there must be some other explanation for these huge hikes in salary. The spokesman for the Institute of Directors stumbled on this morning, trying to patch together some sort of defence. He said that being in the private sector meant running greater risks, which in turn deserved higher rewards. He gave a few examples, mentioning that the new bosses can now be declared bankrupt, which they could not be before. But then, all the directors who are paid only £40,000 a year can be declared bankrupt. The argument does not stand up or justify people awarding themselves an extra £150,000 a year.

On went the spokesman as best he could, trying to defend the indefensible. He said that these directors can now go to gaol: they could not before. Some might argue that they should go to gaol for having awarded themselves such huge salary increases, but if they do not commit fraud or break the law, for which they should go to gaol anyway, where is the risk? How many bosses are there behind bars in Britain, banged up because they took risks in the free market? That shows the complete nonsense of the argument and it exposes the useless arguments in defence of these increases that we have heard from Conservative Members.

The truth is that these greedy bosses are using privatisation to cash in and to line their own pockets. No one, least of all Tory Members, should be at all surprised by that development. Tory Members have blindly supported, for more than a decade, a philosophy based on the pursuit of financial gain. I can well remember being told by Tory Members that there was no such thing as society, that the good Samaritan was a sap and that it is all about, "What I want at a time when I want it and at the place I want it." That was their creed and it has now become the creed of their creation, the privatised bosses.

It was those same Ministers who, under the spell of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), created the very situation which they and the Prime Minister now condemn but do nothing about. That would be laughable were it not so tragic for the rest of us.

We are told that profit-related pay goes some way to explaining how all this has come about. When the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) introduced profit-related pay in one of his early Budgets he claimed that it was designed to achieve a level of pay that would enable workers to be priced into jobs instead of being priced out of them. He warned that in a free economy it is the responsibility of employers and management to control industry's costs, and its wage costs in particular. He went on to warn that there can be no excuse for failure to discharge that responsibility—yet failing to discharge it is precisely what these privatised bosses have done. They have put themselves first with no thought of the impact on the cost structure of their industries.

These huge pay hikes are bound to bring about a deep sense of unfairness among the workers in the electricity industry and elsewhere in the economy. If workers are told that they have to accept lower pay rises to keep their pay increases as low as or even lower than the rate of inflation, they will look up and see the bosses awarding themselves increases sometimes of 20 times the rate of inflation. How can anyone tell them to accept that as fair? It will not work. The workers will rightly conclude that what is good enough for the bosses should be good enough for them, too.

These huge increases will achieve a wages spiral—massive rises at the top will create a demand for similar rises all the way down to the shop floor. What chance is there of economic recovery or of pulling out of the recession if we are all paying ourselves more than we produce, just like the privatised bosses in the electricity industry do?

Privatisation was recently described as selling people what they already own at less than its true value. In other words, it was a con, a rip-off and a fraud perpetrated on the people of this country. So, too, are the pay increases that these privatised bosses have awarded themselves. They are a disgrace, and so are the Prime Minister and the Government to have allowed them to get away with it.

8.39 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): This is Labour's choice of debate on its Supply day and the public might be forgiven for thinking that the Opposition might have taken the opportunity to praise the work force in the electricity supply industry for their tremendous and remarkable efforts in the past three years to turn an industry under state control into three important and profitable privatised industries. The Opposition could have welcomed the price reductions for electricity and gas and the injection of competition into generation. Some 20 new schemes have already been put forward and there are great hopes for renewables and combined heat and power. They could also have congratulated the National Grid Company on its expert handling of the pooling of prices which the Opposition said would not work. It is working brilliantly. They could have congratulated the 12 regional electricity companies and the two generating companies on exceeding the profit forecasts that were set out in their prospectuses.

The Opposition denigrated the efforts of all those who work in the power industries. They dismissed price reductions as fairly irrelevant and whipped themselves into a fury of sham indignation about the salaries of a few key managers and directors while totally ignoring the benefits of privatisation to the consumer. They did that because of misplaced allegiance to the dogma of nationalisation.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman says that everyone in the electricity industry should take credit for what the hon. Gentleman regards as the transformation of the industry. Why did only the directors receive a 12·5 per cent. bonus on privatisation? None of the staff received such a bonus.

Mr. Moss: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the staff participated in the shareholding at the time of privatisation. The percentages are 95 for gas, 98 for the regional electricity companies and 98 for the generating companies. Those people will have benefited from the share profits and high dividends.

The Opposition confirmed that a Labour Government would give high priority to the renationalisation of the national grid. Obviously, that is to be Labour's vehicle for controlling and dominating the electricity supply industry. The grid controls the pricing pool and distribution and would give Labour Ministers maximum opportunity to interfere at will. That is Labour's hidden agenda and no doubt we shall see more of it.

Labour's interventionist policy is tantamount to blackmail and seeks to bring the regional electricity companies and the generating companies into line with what Labour thinks is best for industry. It is a knife at the jugular vein of the electricity supply industry. We were not told the time over which such events would take place, and we were certainly not told about the costs. How are shareholders in the regional electricity companies to be compensated for the proportion of their shareholding in the national grid company? The motion refers to,

"unrestrained increases in the profits . . . pay and perks of . . . Directors".

There are three essential questions about the salary increases. First, are the structure and operational objectives of the privatised companies and the two generating companies different from when they made up the CEGB? The answer is yes, because they are now competing with each other, with nuclear electricity and with the newcomers in the generating industry. They have new responsibilities to shareholders and have to contend with a regulatory framework which seeks to protect consumer interests. They are not the same commercial operations as before.

Secondly, are the jobs of the senior managers materially different? The answer is yes. Their performance now is ultimately measured by the City institutions, the regulatory authority and the director general. That measurement is precise and is devastatingly effective, as many managing directors have found to their cost. Decision-making is fully exposed to public scrutiny because the evidence of decisions is shown in yearly accounts and balance sheets. Senior management is also scrutinised by the regulatory authority in terms of the quality of customer service and on environmental matters, which are now extremely important.

Thirdly, are not National Power and PowerGen among the top 100 largest companies in the United Kingdom economy, and does not that inevitably mean that they will have to pay the United Kingdom market price for quality

[Mr. Moss]

labour at managing director or any other level? I reiterate the evidence quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam). *The Guardian* of 13 June compared the salaries of the managing directors of National Power and PowerGen with the salaries in the United Kingdom's major companies. The results were surprising. The salaries quoted for the managing directors of National Power and PowerGen are tiny compared with some of the salaries being paid to the captains of industry.

The director general of the CBI said that the executive pay of the leading private power generators in Germany is, on average, 50 per cent. more than the salaries paid to the managing directors of Britain's two generating companies.

Further evidence on executive pay parity is contained in the table produced by P-E International which shows that United Kingdom executive pay ranks seventh in the 11 European countries that were measured, even when adjusted for the relative cost of living. It was 10th in the league table on absolute figures. Switzerland was on top followed by Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom. That evidence shows that pay in the energy industry is not excessive when measured against other executive pay in the United Kingdom, against other energy utilities in Europe and against average executive pay in the EC countries.

I understand that Labour is in favour of the single market and convergence of salaries and wages. Would it oppose a convergence of salaries for top executives to bring them into line with our European competitors? The pay rises came to light as a result of the publication of preliminary results for the year ending 31 March 1991. The salaries have already been paid. The decisions about increases—labelled insensitive and embarrassing by some Opposition Members—were taken in the previous financial year, that is, before 31 March 1990. With hindsight, that can be seen as an attempt at equalisation with salaries in comparable United Kingdom industries of similar size. The gap must be made up. We can question the phasing, but if these men were to be replaced tomorrow salary levels of the current order would have to be offered to attract the right calibre of applicant.

The Opposition accuse the Government of promoting these large increases as the price for compliance with the privatisation process. That overlooks the benefit of privatisation not only to consumers but to shareholders. Privatisation raised £12 billion for the taxpayer—£8 billion from the regional electricity companies and about £4·3 billion from the two generating companies. It reduced Government subsidies and reduced any requirement on the PSBR in future years. By holding back 40 per cent. of the privatisation of the generating companies the Government will be able to benefit the taxpayer as a result of the growth of future profits.

As I have said, employee share ownership is high and has led to strong motivation of the work force to bring about the significant changes of the past few years. Profits are good for employees, shareholders and taxpayers. The year-end accounts that have just been published for PowerGen show that this year PowerGen will pay £92·5 million in corporation tax. The taxpayer would not like to lose that money, which would be available for investment. The report and account goes on to say:

"The capital programme includes the two CCGT power stations at Killingholme and at Rye House."

The Opposition opposed the private Bill on Killingholme all the way. These cost approximately £290 million and £240 million respectively at current price levels. The company is already committed to flue gas desulphurisation refitting at Ratcliffe at a cost of £250 million.

"In addition, PowerGen is investing significant sums at existing major power stations in order to secure their continued profit-making potential for the future."

We then come to the crux of the report, where it says:

"It is expected that this substantial expenditure will be financed from internal resources".

There we have another advantage of privatisation. This is money not from the taxpayer or from the Government. This capital investment is made as a result of profits.

The utilities are regulated for consumer protection on a scale hitherto never envisaged. Just one example of the impact of the director general can be seen in the case of gas. Mr. McKinnon of Ofgas has negotiated for the coming year a change in the RPI minus X formula for pricing, which will mean approximately 15 per cent. lower prices over the next five years. The accusation that the directors general are toothless is misplaced. Labour's motion is misguided and prompted by outmoded conceptions of state control and interference in industry. Shareholders in the privatised state industries have been warned: beware the Labour hidden agenda.

8.51 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I will take up two of the invitations extended by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss). I pay tribute to the staff of the two industries concerned which supply us with a crucial element of our national economy. Secondly, it is right to acknowledge that the cost of electricity and gas to the domestic consumer has gone down.

The hour and a half of the debate so far has largely been a dialogue of the deaf. The Government have pretended that there is nothing wrong with their new model privatised gas and electricity industries and the Labour party has protested that there is nothing right about them. Neither is right. When the Bills that privatised the two industries went through the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) was the spokesman for our party. We have argued a consistent position throughout the decade of debate on privatisation. It is that the Government's proposals would not achieve real competition, although we were not opposed to the privatisation of either industry. We regarded proper competition in a privatised industry as an acceptable way forward because it would give consumers power and benefits.

However, what has gone wrong has manifested the weakness of the non-competitive element of what are now private monopolies, as has been mentioned before, and not private sector competing companies, apart from a few exceptions. Our argument was that if we were to go down the road of privatisation, it could be done in certain sectors on a trial basis to test the market and, secondly, it should be done while giving far greater powers to the consumer and ensuring greater regulation thereafter. After half a decade or more of privatised gas, and a year or so of privatised electricity, our predictions have been proved right.

There have been technically unrestrained increases in both profits and pay. They are not restrained by the regulatory process, although prices are. Of itself, that is not a problem, and restraint mechanisms might introduce problems. The Labour party's two proposals for controlling profits—price capping and a special lump sum tax—have major flaws. Price capping has an environmental disadvantage because by encouraging the use of energy by reducing prices artificially, one discourages conservation. A special lump sum tax offends against the regulations and the legislation that brought the industries into operation, as the Secretary of State pointed out. I should be interested to know how any Labour spokesman thinks that it would be possible to have a new form of lump sum tax without getting into difficulties over large-scale compensation for the shareholders.

A more topical and provocative recent issue is the scale of the pay increases awarded to senior executives. The Government are not being consistent on this. The hon. Members for Cambridgeshire, North-East and for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) were so keen to defend the industries that they failed to recognise the major criticism of these recent pay increases. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have made that criticism, but have failed to say what they will do about it. The criticism is not that these industries may have to pay people a high price to be competitive with the private sector, nor that they may have to pay a high price to be competitive with industries in Europe. I accept both those arguments. The criticism is that it is not possible to justify paying such large sudden increases at a time when the policy of the country and of those industries is to urge on their staff restraint in pay increases of between 10 and 6 per cent., when those people start off at a lower wage.

It is unacceptable and if should not be possible for people who are already at the top of their industry's income levels to award themselves whopping increases just because, they believe, it is justified by comparisons with Europe or the rest of the private sector. What offends is the level and speed of the increases at a time when we are in a recession and, as the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) said, jobs will suffer directly in these industries. I fail to understand how these people can look the employees whom they sack in the face when they have awarded themselves such massive pay increases.

Furthermore, it is unacceptable for the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to say that nothing can be done. This may not be the most accurate of parallels, but it serves. If the Government can call in the heads of banks, entirely privately, to tell them that the way that their policies are impinging on other people is unacceptable, then they can surely call in the heads of companies in which they have a 40 per cent. shareholding to tell them that such pay increases are unacceptable.

As I said in my intervention to the Secretary of State, it is a pretty clear exercise in backscratching when the non-executive directors award the executive directors their salary increases, the executive directors award the non-executive directors their salary increases and they are advised by consultants who are appointed by the directors, so they cannot claim that they are getting independent consultative advice, especially when the advisers get a large fee for their consultancy and the advice is that salaries should be increased considerably. That does not wash.

The Labour party talks about the damage caused to the long-term interests of the country and the harming of the environment, and the industry has only begun to do what it should. It has begun to consider that energy efficiency measures are part of the remit of the regulator. It should now extend that remit to include energy conservation requirements in the gas and electricity industries. At the moment, the shareholders' interests appear to be given far greater priority than the interests of energy efficiency and conservation. We recommend that both those matters are put in the cost indices which the regulator has to establish when regulating the industry.

The argument about the increase to the trade deficit is not as clear as the Labour party suggests. I understand the argument that it has a direct impact on the coal industry. That is clear and I know that that is the genesis of the argument. But the reality is that if prices are kept down, the price to manufacturing industry goes down, therefore, the price of manufactured products such as steel goes down, the ability to export increases and the trade balance is affected beneficially rather than disadvantageously. That argument is not entirely clear. In addition, an extra tariff on fuel imports would offend against GATT and the European energy charter which we in the House debated only a couple of weeks ago and appeared, on an all-party basis, to support.

Lastly, I want to propose some suggestions for making the privatised industries more effectively responsive to the consumer interest. We must protect those on low incomes far better than we are. That means the abolition of standing charges and legislation to prevent those unjustified cut-offs which still happen. I give but one example of a disabled pensioner whose supply was disconnected and was told that it would cost £50 for it to be restored with no proof that he was the cause of the problem which caused the local electricity board, in this case in London, to disconnect the supply.

The best way to keep down bills for people on low incomes is to encourage energy efficiency and conservation to ensure that their homes do not need so much heating and are not cold and damp, and so on. It is part of a comprehensive environmental policy. Moreover, the rip-offs that private owners often impose on their tenants are unjustifiable.

Secondly, the directors general should have their terms of reference widened to include non-monopoly services such as wiring and equipment fitting. Thirdly, as has been recommended over many years but nothing has happened, we should not just take the statistics of the industry as being the statistics which determine exactly how many complaints are being made. That needs to be independently monitored.

Lastly, a point made clearly by all objective commentators, regulation is a secretive process. The regulator is not accountable in any of these cases. If we are to have effective regulation of privatised industries, we must give the regulator some power and the consumer and the consumers' representatives some teeth. At the moment, the so-called free-market industries give the consumer very little power.

9.1 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): This is an interesting and important debate because we are talking about an essential element for the society in

[Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark]

which we live. Profit should not be a dirty word because without profit nothing is created. There is no money to invest unless there is a profit from labour and from capital.

The privatisation of the monopolies has yielded many benefits for Britain. Some £12 billion or more has been available from the people's money to invest in the health service, education, roads and many other important things in Britain. In freeing those companies from direct state control they have been able to borrow money instead of its being part of the public sector borrowing requirement. The companies have been able to do essential and necessary things while the money has been free to use.

One of the problems of the argument that we as Conservatives have with socialists is that sometimes comments on salaries are made more from the politics of envy and malice than of common sense and justice. Many people say that if people earn more than they do it is not right or decent. We will always have people who invent something or do things which enable them to become hugely successful and we should honour them for that, whether it is the Alan Sugars of this world, who build companies such as Amstrad from nothing, making themselves worth £200 million or £300 million, or anyone else. No one in his right mind should have any argument with that. Creating with vision something from nothing is something that we should all support. Such people create real wealth, hope and opportunity for everyone.

Some people, however, have not created the companies that they run; they have merely been taken on board as managers to do a decent job. I make no secret of the fact that, had I been in charge, I would not have privatised the water industry, which strikes me as the classic example of an absolute monopoly. Unless we are willing to carry a bucket 10 miles and back, none of us can go anywhere else for our water. The same applies to the electricity and gas industries. Some of the arguments that are currently being advanced show not that the directors are underpaid, but that they lack an understanding of the real world.

Many of those directors were happy to jog along on £40,000, £50,000, £60,000 or £70,000 a year before. If people believe that, on privatisation, those same directors will rush off to other companies unless they are paid another £250,000 or £350,000, they will believe anything. Not only this country, but the whole world, experiences industrial and employment problems. Would those men really rush off to America, France and Germany because they thought that they would not be paid another £250,000 a year?

Of course, entrepreneurs must be paid. Those who are genuinely able to create growth must be paid for it. But let us consider what has happened. Between 1930 and 1950, company directors expected to earn between seven and 10 times more than their average employee; between 1950 and 1980, they expected to earn between 12 and 20 times more than that employee. Suddenly—perhaps because of the influence of a few mad entrepreneurs in America—chief executives are expecting to earn between 40 and 70 times more than their average employees.

If that were backed up by productivity, it would seem worth while. Between 1980 and 1990, however, the productivity of some of those great men—without whom industry would supposedly crumble—has risen by 150 per cent., while their salaries have risen by 320 per cent. I believe that it should be the other way round. I believe in the creation of wealth. That is why I mentioned Alan Sugar of Amstrad, who is worth every penny of the millions that he has made: after all, he created the company. Why do people imagine that they should be paid exorbitant sums without producing exorbitantly good results?

I accept that, for some of those people, it all becomes a macho business. They do it more for the ego and the status than for reasons of greed. There are, of course, the Sir Ralph Halperns of this world; they are good at some things, but, whatever else Sir Ralph did five times a night, he was not creating profits. With his £1 million-a-year income, he produced a company that is now almost bankrupt.

Those who lead businesses should create something before they receive their rewards, on a basis of the earnings per share on the capital employed and the creation of genuine prosperity. They should not think merely of being able to increase prices and get away with it.

I suggest three things, not just for privatised industries, but as an amendment to the Companies Act 1989 which should apply to all executive directors. First, the salaries of executive directors should have to be agreed by all the shareholders at an annual general meeting and they should be explained before they are passed. Secondly, non-executive directors who form part of the remuneration committees should be appointed for six years on a non-extendable basis so that they would be truly non-executive and truly independent. Thirdly, directors' contracts should run for three years. They should not be rolling contracts so that if they are sacked because of inefficiency they run off with £1 million so that it might be worth being sacked instead of running the company.

If we did that, and directors were worth their money, they would easily be able to find other jobs and so would cost more than the mediocre people who run many of our businesses today. It is not a way of cutting salaries but of cutting down to size people who think that, because they are lucky enough to be running privatised monopolies or other companies and the money looks so good, they should have their hand in the till. That is the way to increase productivity, prosperity and capitalism, not some of the seedy things that go on now.

9.11 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The previous two speakers have given the House some useful information. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) rightly drew attention to the need for transparency of power and capacity in the regulator. Experience makes it clear that that is the case. When we were discussing this in Committee, in regard to both gas and electricity, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and some of my hon. Friends emphasised that point. I agree also with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark). He has demonstrated that there is little regard for efficiency or the principles that once inspired the Conservative party. It is an outrage that the Government have used the word "successful" twice in the amendment.

Mr. Morgan: They do not believe it.

Mr. Hardy: Of course, they do not believe it. No one in Britain in his right mind believes it.

I have mentioned before, but it is worth mentioning again, that last year I took part in a major debate in Budapest on the economy of eastern Europe. The European Conservative group, led by Conservative Members, presented a paper that urged the east Europeans to privatise all their assets. As an example they quoted British Gas. The document said that, after substantial costs had been incurred, the British Government received £1·74 billion from the sale of British Gas. The Conservative group said that, because of the money received from the sale, Britain was helped enormously and there was greater capacity to invest. It urged eastern Europe to do the same.

I spoke in the debate immediately after them and pointed out that we had sold British Gas for one tenth of what it was worth and that the figure quoted in the document was one tenth of the asset value of British Gas. I said that I would not argue about the merits of privatisation or suggest that everything should be under state control because I believe in a mixed economy. However, I said that I did not think that British Gas was a sensible example to offer eastern Europe.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hardy: No. I intend to be brief.

Interestingly, I was followed in that debate by the leader of the German equivalent of the Confederation of British Industry. That gentleman said that he had no objection to privatisation in principle, but that if the public asset was sold for markedly less than its true worth, it was a corrupt act. That was not my view—it was the view of the right wing. It was the view of the intelligent business men in Germany. I wish that the Government's economic motivation matched that which has been displayed by the growth and investment in Germany in recent years.

Instead, the position in Britain is scandalous. There is complete disregard for the fact that 20 million people are on or below the poverty line. How do they feel when they see these obscene examples? How do the captains of the wealth-producing industries feel when they see the burdens heaped on their shoulders by the pricing policies adopted by these public monopolies?

Steel has been mentioned. Under this Administration, thousands of jobs have been wiped out in my area. Our remaining industry is special steels. Investment has taken place and we have the finest plant in Europe, skilled and highly motivated work forces and traditional markets, but all that is imperilled by appalling electricity price increases.

Mr. MacKenzie and others involved in the steel industry and other heavy-energy using industries have been to see the Minister with responsibility in this matter. I took representatives of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation to see the Minister to complain about the fact that the imposition of the latest round of price increases threatened markets and the continuation of and achievements in that vital industry.

No regard is paid to manufacturing industry. It is about time the Government began to understand the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) that this lot, highly paid as they are, are making us dependent on imported coal, of which there is no security of supply. This lot are determined to wipe out the British coal industry and make us dependent on overseas sources which will take us to the cleaners when we have wiped out our industry. This lot are completely unconcerned about the fact that, before the 1990s are over, the balance of payments implications will involve about £1 billion.

We are already in a grievous and devastating economic position. The Government must go down in history as evil in their results, stupid in their approach and utterly amoral in their character.

9.17 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The Labour party's motion is interesting as much for what it leaves out as for what it includes. For example, there is no mention of British Telecom. Not long ago, the Labour party warned us that, if that industry were privatised, those without telephones would face bleak prospects, prices would rise faster than inflation, people in rural areas would not have access to the system and there would be a reduction in the number of call boxes. There were also horror stories about engineers being electrocuted as a result of people attaching non-BT equipment to the system.

What is the reality? The number of telephone lines has increased by 20 per cent., 4 million more people now have telephones, prices have fallen by 20 per cent. in real terms, people in rural areas now get telephones faster than ever before and the number of call boxes has increased by 11,000.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): The hon. Gentleman is speaking in the wrong debate.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Lady says that I am speaking in the wrong debate. I suggest that she read the Government's amendment and recall that the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) gave a great diatribe about the steel industry. The Government's amendment says that this House

"congratulates the Government on continuing with its successful policy of privatising nationalised industries".

British Telecom is a privatised national industry. To continue with my points, no one has been electrocuted as a result of the installation of non-BT equipment.

The hon. Member for Wentworth told us about how awful things were in the steel industry. He said that it was in a terrible state and that what the Government were doing to the coal industry would damage our balance of payments. Under the Labour Government's tutelage, the British steel industry was the world's largest loss maker and our iron and steel trade faced a chronic deficit. Now, British Steel is one of the most successful steel manufacturers in the world—admittedly in difficult world conditions at the moment. For the first time in many years, we export far more iron and steel than we import. That is a great success.

Mr. Morgan: Tell us about Lloyd's of London.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman asks me to tell him about Lloyd's of London. What would he like me to tell him? Perhaps he could be more specific. There is deafening silence.

I remind the Opposition of their attitude to British Telecom and to the steel industry because it shows the reality of Labour. Labour always supports the status quo and it always opposes change, especially if it harms the interests of their friends in the public sector unions.

[Mr. Oppenheim]

One of the main advantages of privatisation for all companies—whether or not they are utilities or semi-monopolies—is that they have the freedom to raise capital. It is worth reminding the House of what used to happen when state-run industries had to wait in the Treasury queue behind other deserving causes such as the national health service when they wanted to raise capital. The Opposition are fond of complaining about crumbling sewers, dirty beaches and polluted rivers, but that situation arose under the system of state ownership when the water industry did not have the freedom to raise its own capital on the free market. Now the water industry is at least able to raise money on the open market and to make record investment in cleaning up our rivers and beaches and restoring sewers.

A factor that is equally important as the freedom to raise capital in the privatised industries is the freedom from political interference. The Opposition want me to deal specifically with the electricity industry, so it is worth reminding ourselves of what used to happen in the electricity industry. The British electricity industry was forced to buy expensive United Kingdom coal, which protected the British coal industry. That resulted in an unproductive industry, with low-paid miners doing a difficult and dangerous job, mining uneconomic coal to produce over-priced electricity. That, in turn, resulted in job losses throughout industry because industry paid more for electricity than it should have paid.

In addition, politicians made a mess of the nuclear programme which is as classic a case of disaster caused by political meddling and interference as one could hope to find. In 1965, it was decided, for political reasons, to go ahead with advanced gas-cooled reactors instead of the cheaper, off-the-shelf, American-made pressurised water reactors, which was the technology chosen by the French. That decision was shrouded in secrecy, but the outcome was that a small, relatively weak United Kingdom consortium was chosen to build a reactor that was far more complex and expensive than the American option. By the early 1970s, all of the five AGRs which had been commissioned were in deep trouble. Even now, Dungeness operates at only a fraction of its planned output. In 1974, as a result of that debacle, Arthur Hawkins, the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board, called it a catastrophe and said that it must never be repeated. He argued for the purchase of the American PWRs, but what happened? He was overruled by politicians who decided to go ahead with yet another over-engineered design for the SHGWR, which was later abandoned on safety grounds after many costs had been incurred.

After all that waste, PWRs were ordered in 1979. So, the dreams of scientists, technocrats and politicians ended as 40 years of gigantic waste of talent and resources, and, after all that, United States reactors were ordered. What could that talent and those resources have achieved if directed elsewhere in the economy where they could have been best deployed and had they been directed by the market rather than by politicians? How much better would the industry have performed if it had not been lumbered with high-cost electricity in those years as a result of ill-thought-out and politically inspired nuclear programmes and as a result of the protection given to the United Kingdom coal industry which enabled it to sell high-cost coal to the generators who had no choice but to buy it?

It is fair to say that, although the utilities have been privatised, especially coal and gas, they do not operate in a complete market environment. They are semi-monopolies, which is precisely why the Government introduced regulation. Most people would agree that the regulation is a great advance on the old system. In the water industry, for example, the water providers' role and the pollution control role have been separated very successfully with the creation of the National Rivers Authority. The NRA is now taking aggressive action against polluters which was never taken when it was the responsibility of the state-run water boards to control pollution.

In the gas and electricity industries, regulators have powers to look into efficiency and into any excess profits that are made when agreeing to the prices that the utilities want to charge. Surely that is the point. If the regulators feel that top salaries are an unjustified burden or that they arise as a result of excess profits, they can act in their capacity to limit prices. That is why the regulators' role is extremely important. If salaries are justified in terms of the performance of the executives, there is no problem. If the salaries represent inefficiency, exploitation or excessive profits, the regulator has the power to limit the price rises in the utilities.

Some Opposition Members, especially the hon. Member for Wentworth, seemed to feel that high payments were immoral. I believe that the hon. Member for Wentworth actually used the word "immoral". Would he use that word about the very large sums earned by many well-known Labour supporters, such as Glenda Jackson, who is standing as a Labour candidate? I could quote many more examples. I cannot take seriously Labour's claim—

Mr. Dobson: There are many cinemas available.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene? If he does, he may go ahead.

Mr. Dobson: The unique feature about the next Member of Parliament for Hampstead and Highgate is that, when she appears at a cinema, people have a choice of cinema to attend.

Mr. Oppenheim: I do not know whether that was meant to be funny.

The hon. Member for Wentworth said that high payments were per se immoral. All I was trying to point out was that there was an element of hypocrisy because so many prominent Labour supporters earn vast sums for doing far less productive jobs than the captains of industry do. I cannot take seriously Labour's claim that we have not introduced enough competition into the system and that high salaries are due to that lack of competition when Labour has opposed every attempt by the Government to introduce more competition into the utilities.

The problem is that Labour has not yet realised that privatisation is far better for industry and for consumers than is nationalisation, even though Labour's socialist colleagues in New Zealand, Australia, Sweden and even, to an extent, France—not to mention the former socialist countries in the eastern bloc—have embraced privatisation. That means that only Labour, Cuba and North

Korea are still in the anti-privatisation camp—the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and Kim Il Sung.

Labour Members are too prone to forget that the Government get a large share of the profits of privatised companies in tax and dividends. The privatised companies pay far more now to the Government than they did as nationalised industries when Labour was in power. I ask the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras how many hospitals and schools Labour would have to close without that money. How many hospitals and schools would Labour have to close to fund its expensive renationalisation programme? The hon. Gentleman said that, under a future Labour Government, the renationalisation of the grid would be a high priority. A priority is born, and I was privileged to be present at its birth. Where does a "high" priority come in the order of priorities, relative to an absolute priority or a top priority? If the hon. Gentleman can tell me what the difference is, I shall happily give way. Again, there is a deafening silence.

At the root of the Opposition's attitude is their desire to meddle with and control industry. The arrogance of Opposition spokesmen in that respect is breathtaking. Few of them have had any experience of business—I except the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), who presided over Jaguar in its darkest days of state ownership—but, despite that, they seek to preach to successful industrialists and to tell them what to do, as they did in the 1970s.

I would take Labour Members' concern about salaries more seriously if they expressed more concern about salaries in the public sector. In the past few years, Derbyshire county council has appointed no fewer than two ex-Labour councillors and an ex-Labour Member of Parliament to jobs that pay more than £40,000 a year. The brother of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), the chairman of Derbyshire Labour party, has been appointed by the county council to a well-paid job as a minder for Japanese business men, despite the fact that he was sacked for corruption by the county council under a previous regime. His wife also has a well-paid job in the county council's public relations department—a service that it needs. Such jobs for the boys are far more damaging than paying executives the market wage that industries need to pay to keep them.

9.30 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I shall return to the subject—the privatised electricity and gas industries—which has little to do with Derbyshire county council.

A measure to privatise the electricity industry in Northern Ireland is going through its parliamentary stages. All the parties in Northern Ireland, apart from the almost non-existent Conservative party, oppose electricity privatisation, yet despite that consensus the Government are continuing with the measure. If there is one part of the kingdom where consensus should be observed, it is Northern Ireland. That measure should be dropped.

I have little time to develop the points that I should like to make, but I wish to mention the flotation of shares in East Midlands Electricity, which coincided with disastrous weather conditions. Those weather conditions and the flotation of East Midlands Electricity produced important political consequences that have not yet been considered by the Government.

Early on 8 December, there was a 14-hour severe blizzard and ice accretion throughout the east midlands, including the constituency of the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). It spread from Chesterfield in the north to past Coventry in the south. For an average of 34 hours, 815,000 customers, or some 2 million people, lost supplies, and many lost supplies for much longer. A week later, 14,500 customers were still without supplies.

On the third day of that emergency, East Midlands Electricity was floated. At that time, 300,000 customers still had no electricity. What was the impact of that emergency on the flotation? How did it affect the value of shares? Amazingly, it seems to have had no impact. That may be explained by the fact that the emergency was kept quiet by the Government so that people would not understand the difficulty that East Midlands Electricity was facing at its birth. No state of emergency was declared. People clearly needed a state of emergency to be declared, whereby the Government would recognise their plight.

By contrast, when there were gales in the south of England in 1987 the Minister immediately came to the Dispatch Box to explain that, because of the emergency, Bellwin moneys would be available to help local authorities to handle the crisis. Nothing like that happened at the flotation of shares in East Midlands Electricity.

The company has now produced a report on the blizzard. It makes various suggestions for technical improvements and talks of providing better communications, but it fails to raise the question why the Government did not declare at the time that a serious emergency had occurred.

The Department of Energy or the Select Committee on Energy should now investigate the matter. Clearly people were not given the emergency provisions and services that would have been available if the Government had tried to tackle the emergency by working hand in glove with East Midlands Electricity plc.

9.36 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): It is a pleasure to wind up the debate, because this may be our last opportunity in this Parliament—which has been my first Parliament—to discuss what is perhaps the biggest set of measures that it has had the chance to consider.

The process of privatisation, on which we are looking back, can be said to have started in November 1987—or even earlier, in the 1987 Conservative election manifesto. In legislative terms it is three and a half years since the publication of the White Paper, the paving debate, Second Reading and so on. We now have a useful opportunity to judge whether privatisation has been the roaring success described in the Government amendment or the mess that the Opposition believe it to be.

It is fair to say that the Government used to regard electricity privatisation as the jewel in the crown of the four years of this Parliament. In the light of the Prime Minister's recent expression of concern about the top people's salaries and the perks in the electricity and gas industries, we ask the Government why the Conservatives' jewel in the crown of this Parliament has gradually become a rescue job, as it did in 1989, when the previous Secretary of State resigned and the present Secretary of State—who

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

is not now in the Chamber—had to take his place. Then, from being a rescue job, why did it become the national scandal that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State evidently now think it is, judging by their attacks on its consequences, such as the way in which the gravy train has been milked by those at the top, and the disparity between the deal given to consumers and taxpayers and that given to those running the industry?

When the present Secretary of State took over in 1989 the patient was looking very sick indeed. The right hon. Gentleman came in as the company doctor for the Government's legislation. One could say that the patient was suffering from pylons. The right hon. Gentleman took a couple of months to review the situation; then he made some changes in the legislation. If I list those changes, hon. Members will see why the present legislation is almost unrecognisable compared with what was originally proposed.

First, the right hon. Gentleman decided to take the nuclear side of the industry out of the privatisation altogether. Secondly, he cancelled the three pressurised water reactors which were in the programme but which had not yet been started. Thirdly, he delayed everything by six months.

The fourth decision was to change the whole basis of the pool arrangements, and the fifth was to sell PowerGen and National Power together instead of separately. The sixth was to retain 40 per cent. of those two companies in the public sector. The seventh change, which was perhaps not intended at the time, was that the Government managed to lose the chairmen of National Power and PowerGen in the process.

Those were fairly substantial changes and one must admit that they at least enabled the Secretary of State to take the next step forward and actually float the industries. By that time, however, there had been a severe loss of confidence, as a result of which fact the Secretary of State had to underprice the shares and overdose on perks to get them away. With the run-up to the Gulf war and privatisation running almost concurrently—with a dreadful inevitability—he decided that flotation would proceed but with a massive extension of the perks that we have come to expect from Conservative privatisations.

Just think what the Government did to ensure that the shares got away which the Government had not done in previous privatisations. They made multiple share ownership legal for the first time. People could apply, as many Tory Members did, on their own behalf, on their spouse's behalf—on behalf of Karen and Darren, grandma and grandpa and anyone else living in the same house as them. One could apply on behalf of six or seven people. Notwithstanding the fact that all those people were effectively one electricity consumer, all of them could enjoy the perk of a reduction in their next electricity bill: there could be six or seven reductions in one electricity bill. What an invitation that would have been to the former hon. Member for Ynys Môn. If he had still been in the House, as he was at the time of the British Telecom flotation, he would have had no difficulty at all with the proposition. Many hon. Members took advantage of it. Many Tory Members will probably be able to pay for the next election campaign and for the school fees for the four children on whose behalf they probably applied out of the profits from the underpricing of the shares, for which they themselves had voted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) said that when he put the proposition to the leader of the German equivalent of the CBI at a conference, that gentleman said that it was a corrupt act for the Government deliberately to vote for the underpricing of assets of which they were to dispose. Knowing the strong leanings of the German equivalent of the CBI towards ensuring that the taxpayer gets a good deal—and taxpayers must get a good deal if the House is to be able to hold its head high on matters affecting the disposal of public assets—I could not put it better.

Having decided to allow people to apply on behalf of their children and anyone else living in their house and to receive perks for all of them, the Government decided to extend to them another perk that had never been offered before: people could sell the shares straight away without waiting for the second and third call and still keep the original perk. People were told, "Even if you are no longer a shareholder a year hence, you will still get money deducted from your electrictiy bill provided that you took part in the flotation." Previously, the Government had said, "Obviously you must keep the shares. You cannot expect to have money deducted from your electricity bill a year after you have disposed of your shares for the first-day profit." But so keen was the Secretary of State to get electricity shares away that he allowed people to buy and sell—to engage in stagging—but still to get money off their electricity bills.

Is it any wonder, in that gravy-train atmosphere—an atmosphere in which multiple-share applications were legalised for the first time—that top people started to realise that the gravy train does not stop with the Secretary of State but could benefit them? It is no use the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State wringing their hands in this curious ineffectual manner at the way in which top people's salaries have rocketed. It is not so much a matter of shutting the stable door after the horses have been stolen. It is more a matter of the Prime Minister looking at the stable door, having removed the latch and lock himself, and wondering why it is swinging back and forth on its hinges while the distant sound of galloping is heard in the next field or the next county, bemoaning the fact that the top people have got away with the pay and extra perks.

An example has already been cited but it has not perhaps been put in its true context. The chairman of British Gas has had his salary increased in a remarkable way, not only in terms of the actual percentage increases that he has received. We know what a reliable organ *The Sun* is and, if it happens to be attacking something that a Conservative Government have done, its reports are probably true. *The Sun* reported that the chairman had received £28,000-worth of perks in the form of goods and work carried out at his house in Bournemouth. A British Gas workman's van had been parked outside his new house in Bournemouth for over a month before somebody finally twigged what was going on and blew the whistle by telling *The Sun*, which then found out that he had had £28,000-worth of free central heating, tumble dryers and other things. British Gas has lamely attempted to recover the position by saying that many British Gas employees are allowed to try out British Gas products and that that

is one of the ways in which employees become involved in the firm. It appears, however, that the chairman is allowed to try out all British Gas's products—all at the same time.

Surely that is not necessary to provide an incentive to senior management who were doing exactly the same job before privatisation. It is an obscenity and an example of the way in which the gravy-train atmosphere has permeated the electricity and gas industries since privatisation. After all, if it is thought necessary to give £28,000-worth of perks to the chairman of British Gas to provide him with an incentive, how would one give an incentive to the chairman of the water and sewage companies?

Are we saying that we should give similar incentives to Treasury Ministers and that if they managed to price the shares of the electricity industry correctly or to get their public expenditure forecasts right we would let them off income tax for a year? Not only would the Queen and the Prince of Wales not pay income tax—the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be in the same position. That is not a principle that we should like to see established, but it is exactly what the Government have engineered for the electricity and gas industries.

Perhaps we should have asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he would have been willing to take a pay cut or to accept a bonus if he had correctly priced the shares that he sold in the electricity industry. If we had done so, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would be leaving the House even sooner than he intends because he would be able to pay attention to far more exciting things, such as being a name again at Lloyd's, where such problems never arise. That would be a way of trying to provide the right hon. Gentleman with an incentive to price the shares correctly so that the taxpayer would get a reasonable bargain. If the right hon. Gentleman is not willing to do that, come the tolling of the liberty bell of democracy at the next election, the Government who will be formed by my right hon. and hon. Friends most certainly will.

9.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I welcome the opportunity that has been presented by this debate and am delighted, in Opposition time, to set out the success of the privatisation programme. The Opposition lost the argument in the last debate on this subject on 16 January and they have lost it again tonight. Consumers, taxpayers and employees are not gullible. They will have seen through the rhetoric that the Opposition have used once again and instead they will listen to the facts, which are not as portrayed by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). They are as follows.

Fact one—the Opposition said that we would never be able to privatise the electricity industry before the election, but we did and it has been a resounding success.

Fact two—we were told that we would not be able to inject competition into the electricity industry, but we have. Competition in generating is growing all the time and it is competition, not Whitehall intervention, that is the best guarantee of efficiency and of ensuring that customers receive good service.

Fact three—consumers are benefiting: prices are controlled and they have new rights and independent regulators to look after their interests. The privatised industries are leading the way in consumer rights which we look to the citizens charter further to promote.

Fact four—share ownership is at a record level. Eleven million people now own shares—25 per cent. of the adult population. It is a clear recognition of the public's desire to share in the success of privatisation.

Fact five—the taxpayer has benefited from privatisation. Not only has there been a direct benefit in terms of the proceeds that have been realised, but privatisation has unlocked efficiency. Nationalised industries overall have had a poor record on profits, investment, productivity and industrial relations. They had combined borrowings of £2·5 billion in 1979. Growing profits mean a growing contribution to the national wealth.

Contrast that with the way in which matters would be on the basis of the contributions under Labour. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that he would renationalise the National Grid Company and give it all sorts of duties. He said that a Labour Government would use their shareholding in National Power and PowerGen to influence—though many of my hon. Friends would say "interfere in"—the running of their businesses. He also said that he would take steps on board pay.

What would that policy mean in practice? It would mean that once again a Labour Government would try to interfere in the running of a business about which they knew nothing. They would interfere in a company that is best left in the hands of those who are skilled at running it and who are accountable to their shareholders for its performance. Once again, the industry would be subject to the dead hand of Whitehall, stifling innovation and interfering in the proper operation of the market.

Electricity prices—in that context the comments of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) were rich—which rose by the equivalent of 2 per cent. every six weeks under Labour, would have to go up again to pay for the costly mistakes that would be made. All the benefits of the improvement in performance would be lost, and to no good purpose. Opposition Members have no coherent strategy on how to respond to privatisation. They have simply come before the House again tonight wanting to turn the clock back and repeat all the mistakes of nationalisation and state intervention.

They do not even understand the workings of the electricity market. Still less do they understand the workings of the financial markets. They continue, as we heard tonight—including from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, who again is laughing, a mask of insecurity behind his ignorance of financial matters—*[Interruption.]* Once again he makes simplistic comparisons between assets and proceeds. Opposition Members' weekly cultivation of friends in the City, if they have any, has not resulted in the facts of the financial markets being imparted to the hon. Gentleman.

That being so, I will help the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras with some figures. It is instructive to see how tonight he arrives at the loss of £29 billion. It changes by £1 billion virtually daily; but, then, so does the cost of the programme of any future Labour Government. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras aggregates, for example, the values of the various privatised companies, in some cases stretching back nearly to the beginning of the 1980s, on an irrelevant replacement cost basis, taking no account of major changes that have occurred in the companies since, and then he compares them with today's

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

market value. By those extraordinary means he arrives at a waste of £27 billion, and then apparently adds £3 billion to give the round figure of £30 billion.

Of course the reality is that the value of a business is nothing more or less than what a prospective purchaser would be prepared to pay for it. Current cost accounting simply measures the replacement cost of assets, some of which may hold little interest for a purchaser, and it is certainly not the amount the taxpayer paid for those assets. So the hon. Gentleman has again conducted a totally futile exercise.

The value of industries such as electricity is based principally on expectations of future earnings. Only by a wholly unjustified increase in prices could the Government have boosted earnings sufficiently to be able to sell the industry for a sum anywhere near the current cost evaluation.

As for the other comparison, with stock market valuations, that the hon. Gentleman made tonight, the shares are rising faster than the overall index of shares. The rising share values of privatised companies since the sale reflect the growth of confidence in the benefits of privatisation as they feed through, including renationalisation and other moves to greater efficiency which improve their prospects.

The value of British Gas, for example, has increased by nearly 80 per cent. on the stock market in the past five years, despite the fact that prices were falling in real terms under the price control formula throughout that period. An even tougher formula, starting next year, is acknowledged to be an extremely demanding target, yet the company still believes that it will be able to increase its dividends, underpinning figure share performance.

Improving prospects, rising share prices, cost-cutting and greater efficiency in all those companies should be welcomed. They represent a clear gain to the nation in contrast to the old order of rising prices to consumers with no means of redress, and little incentive for improved efficiency. Those were real costs and burdens on the nation, as opposed to the wholly fictitious £30 billion conjured up by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

It is remarkable that Labour Members should even mention disconnections. Under a Labour Government in the late 1970s the level of disconnections was substantially higher than at present. Those worst hit were pensioners and the poor, and Opposition Members laughed when we debated the importance of reducing the number of disconnections. The Government have attached importance to introducing a code of practice on disconnections, designed to safeguard the least well off. It provides that no pensioner's household may be cut off during the winter months and, since the introduction of the code of practice, disconnections have fallen to their lowest levels since records began.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined clearly the benefits of privatisation as opposed to nationalisation, renationalisation or extended state control. In the 1990s there will be a renewed emphasis on quality of life issues, such as a higher standard of living, a secure and diverse energy supply with improved safety measures, and higher environmental standards. Increasing competition will remain the most effective pressure on companies to deliver those objectives, act efficiently and provide customers with the service that they deserve. On that matter I agree fully with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark).

The regulators in the recently privatised industry will set tight and improved standards of service, which will be well publicised so that consumers can assess the standard of service that they can reasonably expect. As my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) stated, we live in a generation in which everyone is a consumer, and consumer protection and choice are increasingly at the centre of policy-making in Europe. We are consumers not only in shops but when we travel to work and from the moment we arrive home. We expect standards and performance from every item and service that we purchase. Contracts that should spell out guaranteed standards of service, penalties for failure, and means of redress and complaint go hand in hand with a free market economy and an enterprise culture based on competition.

On 2 July 1991 the House of Commons should not be the place for Labour-inspired weary debates in which every contribution by Opposition Members harks back to the days of socialism and state intervention. It is clear from the debate that salaries should be sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate. It is not for the Government to second-guess remuneration. It is not intervention to question whether recent increases meet that test. All levels of pay should take account of the economic facts of life and the importance of beating inflation. Directors must show leadership, and moving to private sector levels should be moderate.

The manufacturing industry has evolved from the traditional two-tier management-work force structure—the us and them syndrome—which often undermines the effects of industrial relations by creating artificial barriers between management and work force. Those barriers are based on privilege and separation. Today, a team approach dominates in the manufacturing industry. The new style of management has contributed much to loosening the grip of the unions when the Government's industrial relations legislation has given management and the work force the tools to work as a team. However, with that new approach has come responsibility to lead by example, win respect, urge moderation in pay demands in a time of recession, and exercise restraint. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was correct to say that he did not believe that excessive salary increases are right. That remains our view. Undoubtedly top directors in the newly privatised companies need motivation, but not, as *The Times* correctly stated, superleague salaries overnight.

The Government's position is clear: our privatisation programme has been good news for the taxpayer, good news for the consumer and good news for the employee. It is a shame that the Opposition still cling to the socialist principles of interference and deny the benefits of privatisation.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House Divided: Ayes 176, Noes 246.

Division No. 196] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Ashton, Joe
Allen, Graham	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul

Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexleyheath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No.30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on continuing with its successful policy of privatising nationalised industries; notes the recent successful privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Great Britain; and welcomes the benefits that privatisation of the electricity and gas industries has brought and will bring to consumers, taxpayers and employees.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Severn Bridges Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Orders of the Day

Severn Bridges Bill

As amended (in the Select Committee and on re-committal in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 5

POWER OF SECRETARY OF STATE TO LEVY TOLLS

10.14 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 3, line 18 at end insert

'after consultations with relevant local authorities in England and Wales'.

The amendment would require the Secretary of State to consult relevant local authorities before raising tolls on the new bridges. It highlights the role of English and Welsh local authorities with regard to the new bridge and the tolling regime. At this stage, we do not know precisely what those local authorities will be. The Secretary of State for Wales has said that there will be a new local authority unitary structure in Wales and we assume, therefore, also on the other side of the Bristol channel.

But whatever structure there might be, it is the view of local authorities in Wales and England that the need for a second Severn crossing is unquestionable. We have put up for too long with enormous congestion on the existing Severn bridge. We know that the economic impact of a second Severn crossing on the Welsh economy will be considerable.

In Gwent alone, where the second Severn crossing will end up, 9·3 per cent. of the people are out of work. The European link is vital to Wales and the second Severn crossing will constitute what is known in Europe as the E30. The second bridge will also have considerable significance with regard to the general transport infrastructure throughout south Wales.

Studies by the standing conference of local authorities in south Wales show that during the past two years, because of the problems of congestion on the present bridge, some 2,000 jobs have been lost in the county of Gwent alone.

However, the amendment is basically about tolls and their level. The impact of tolls and their level on the local economy is considerable. When we consider that the whole of the tolling regime on the present bridge is equivalent in financial terms to what Gwent receives from the regional selective assistance grant, the regional enterprise grant and the European regional development fund we realise what a significant impact tolls can have on the economy of Gwent and south Wales.

It is interesting that Tyne and Wear county council—before it was abolished—recently studied the tolling regime on the Tyne tunnel corridor and it came to the conclusion that, in comparison with other areas within its remit, the Tyne tunnel corridor was detrimental to other areas which had no tolls.

One aspect of the amendment which was touched on in Committee on several occasions was the level of debt on the existing bridge which, if written off, could reduce tolls on the new bridges by 1995 by about 20 per cent. There were many arguments in Committee about whether the

Government would be prepared to write off the debt on the bridge and, in so doing, reduce the tolls on the two bridges when the new regime came into operation.

Only yesterday, during transport questions, an hon. Member asked the Minister for Roads and Traffic what the tolling regime would be on the Humber bridge, which has been compared with the Severn bridge on more than one occasion. The Minister replied that the Government were considering the whole question of the debt on the Humber bridge with a view to writing off at least a portion of it and, in so doing, reducing the general level of tolls on the Humber bridge. I sincerely hope that the Minister will tell us whether the Government's decision to write off some of the debt on the Humber bridge is relevant to the Severn bridge.

In our view, the local inquiries that have been held, by law, three times since the opening of the existing bridge —in 1979, 1984 and 1989—were a good idea. Local circumstances were taken into account; the local economy was monitored; and the CBI, the AA, the RAC, the Road Haulage Association and many other bodies gave evidence to the inspector about the impact of increased toll levels on the existing bridge and the south Wales economy.

In Committee, the Government decided not to support the continuation of local inquiries under the new Severn bridge regime. We believe that, now that the Government have turned down that idea, the widest possible consultation should take place between the relevant local authorities—on both the English and the Welsh sides—when the Secretary of State is considering whether to increase toll levels on both bridges. That would be a good gesture and it would also provide the Government with a valuable source of information.

I hope that, as well as telling us whether he considers consultation important, the Minister will say something about the information about the Humber bridge that we were given yesterday.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): First, let me declare an interest: my brother-in-law, Mr. Micky Pople, is a partner in the English Stones fisheries, which has the salmon netting rights under one of the pillars of the bridge.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) spoke of the need to consult the relevant local authorities. The Opposition have tabled an amendment about policing services, and another about compensation for concessionaires. I wish to put it on record that my brother-in-law and his friends have had to spend many months, and much of their own money, fighting for compensation. Now, finally, they have been granted compensation, but without legal costs. I feel that that is wrong, and I have used this opportunity to state their case.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Whatever is decided this evening, it should be said that many of us in Wales welcome the bridge. At last people are getting on with building the thing.

We all agree that many of the haulage firms are doing splendid work in taking the products of Wales across to markets in England and on the continent. Nevertheless, many of us fear that, for a long time to come, the unit costs of those products will continue to be inflated by the expense caused by traffic jams, and by the present system of road transport and the way in which vehicles currently have to use the bridge. Surely the Government should be as concerned about other forms of transport infrastructure, in conjunction with the bridge, as they are about the building of the bridge itself.

This bridge will stand as a great tribute to engineering in the 20th century; but will Wales be able to provide other such tributes? Will we, for example, have a road-rail infrastructure that begins to reflect the true cost—and it is an enormous cost—of road transport as it takes our products towards England and into the continent?

The hidden costs of road transport are enormous. Not only are we now contemplating building a great piece of engineering, and a great monument to our love of road transport; we are, or should be, seriously considering how Wales can best be served by a road-rail link with the channel tunnel, the English markets and the economic market in general. Alongside the marvellous structure across the Severn I should like to see another structure, perhaps a series of loading bays or depots where there might be an interaction between road and rail transport. We might see the sort of experiments that are currently taking place in Germany, where we would contemplate not only a bridge but the means of taking away from the roads much of the heavy traffic and putting it on to rail. In that way the second crossing would not become as congested and damaged in 15 or 20 years as the present bridge has become. No matter how brilliant our planners or engineers may be, we are all fallible. We tend to get projections wrong. In a sense, we should be planning for safety to ensure that there is back-up for the second crossing. I hope to see Wales flourish. I hope that the transformation of our economy will continue so that in the future a great diversity of products will come from Wales.

We are on the periphery of Europe. Our unit costs are important if we are to take advantage of the great new opportunities of the single market and, more importantly, if we are to tap the potential of the expanding markets in southern and eastern Europe. Wales is vulnerable in that respect. If our transport infrastructure is not right now, we will pay for it in decades to come. We must plan that far ahead. Will the Minister consider carefully the idea that the great vision of a second crossing should be accompanied by another vision—a dream form of rail transport that works alongside the roads for the betterment of Wales and a better future for us all?

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I was the Chairman of the Select Committee which considered this bridge. Having lived in Wales and used the Severn bridge for many years some 15 or 20 years ago, I was amazed that the cost of the original building work and the enormous cost of repairs —£70 million or £80 million in recent years—can all be repaid by the joint venture firm, Laing-Entrepose, which is the concessionaire, from the tolls that will be levied on the opening of the new bridge, the tolls on the existing bridge and the handover back to the Department. Therefore, I am delighted that there is no need to write off any debt, which the Select Committee on Transport proposed six or seven years ago when I was a member of it. Write-off is needed on the Humber bridge, which does not have the same usage and cannot recover its debt.

I am delighted that vehicles of all sorts using the Severn bridge are able to pay tolls that are adequate to pay for the original building, the repair work and the construction of the new bridge. Therefore, I see no reason for public inquiries or detailed lengthy consultations with local

[Mr. Den Dover]

authorities. The users in both England and Wales and the Welsh people will benefit enormously from the new facility.

I reject the amendment. The toll regime in the Bill is more than adequate and we will see a first-class facility in use as early as possible without any delays caused by public inquiries.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I support the amendment. It is essential that local authorities are consulted, but the process need not take long. The second Severn crossing is essential and it should be completed in the shortest possible time. However, we need some consultation with local authorities. I agree with the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), who spoke of the need to improve the rail infrastructure at the same time. If, in recent years, we have managed to bring about a rail-road crossing on the Britannia bridge across the Menai straits, surely we should have the wit and imagination to provide road and rail crossings at the point of the new bridge. The project should be more ambitious than is envisaged.

We believe that local authorities should be consulted. The present tolls are a tax on Welsh business, and that fact should be taken into account. I do not entirely agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) about tolls. For those who cross the bridge frequently, they are excessive. The bridge is a lifeline for Welsh industry and tourism, so we must be careful about what we do.

10.30 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Until I heard the comments of the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), I had not intended to take part in the debate. I, too, was a member of the Select Committee on Transport which considered toll crossings. I am amazed that any Opposition Member wants to talk about the Humber bridge, let alone in conjunction with the Severn crossing, given that that is a feasible project which will pay its way, as opposed to one which was designed purely to win a certain by-election some 25 years ago.

The Severn crossing is intended to bring Wales closer to England. As for the Humber bridge, both parts of Humberside were taken over and want to go back into Lincolnshire as fast as they can, because they do not like the way in which they have been joined.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not follow the path suggested by the hon. Member for Torfaen. No other scheme should be compared to the Humber bridge. Frankly, I do not think that it should have been built in the first place. The proposed bridge is needed for the good of the Welsh economy.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) stressed the importance of a rail connection. We want to encourage the movement of more goods by rail. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport declared that to be his policy. Let us be honest about this—whatever we do in the next few years, most freight will continue to go by road. If the Welsh economy is to expand, it will increasingly need goods to be transported on lorries across the Severn. Any attempt to delay the building of the bridge, and anything that introduces more public discussion and means that it will take longer for the bridge to be built, is detrimental to the Welsh economy. I am slightly surprised that the Opposition put forward such views.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover), who chaired the Select Committee so expeditiously. The House should be grateful to him and to his colleagues on the Committee. I agree with my hon. Friend that the existing Severn bridge is already a great success and that the new bridge will bring great benefits to the Welsh economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) and the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) referred to rail freight. I remind the House that there will be a rail freight terminal in Cardiff to ship freight through the channel tunnel—that is a commitment for 1993—and the rail freight that will be shipped from south Wales will be able to come through the existing tunnel underneath the Severn.

Mr. Livsey: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that speedy links with the channel tunnel depend on electrification of the south Wales line? Is it correct that the present Severn tunnel will not accommodate an electrification scheme? Will the hon. Gentleman clarify that? It could have an adverse impact on the future of business in south Wales.

Mr. Freeman: Rail freight shipment does not need electrified lines and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, a considerable amount of freight will be collected and hauled through the tunnel by diesel and then electric locos from the terminals in London. Although speed is important for freight, it is not as important as it is for passenger traffic. I understand that the Great Western railway can be electrified as and when it is appropriate to electrify it, all the way from London to Swansea and Cardiff.

Mr. Adley: The Minister has raised the question of the Great Western railway—and where would we be without it? So, may I ask him for about the one hundred and seventeenth time to reconsider the line from Reading to Ashford via Guildford and Redhill about which——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We are dealing with the Severn bridge.

Mr. Adley: The Minister referred to rail traffic crossing the Severn bridge on its way to the channel tunnel. That is precisely the line——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman mentioned Ashford.

Mr. Adley: To get to the line to which the Minister referred it is necessary to travel by rail via Ashford.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The same could be said about travelling from Inverness.

Mr. Adley: The Minister referred to the channel tunnel and to traffic from south Wales. I hope that I am not abusing the House by referring to the line that the Minister has just mentioned. Will he please reconsider the utilisation of the line which was built in the previous

century specifically to take traffic to the channel tunnel and which was not closed down by Dr. Beeching who said that one day the tunnel would be built?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not see what that has to do with the amendment.

Mr. Freeman: I feared that I should be shunted up that line. I have already had a tutorial from my hon. Friend, and I am sure that I shall have many more, on the value of a west-about-route around London to carry freight.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) raised a number of issues——

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the Minister say a little more about what he mentioned before the intervention of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley)? He said that there would be a road-rail interchange for freight traffic crossing the Severn bridge and that it would be located in Cardiff. Is that what he said? If so, where in Cardiff will that interchange be located and when will the official public announcement of investment by British Rail or by others take place?

Mr. Freeman: A few days ago the Minister for Roads and Traffic made a statement about the terminal in Cardiff. I am happy to repeat that for all combined transport—that is, freight that is collected by road for onward trans-shipment by rail—British Rail will have a terminal in Cardiff for 1993. I am not familiar with the sidings in Cardiff, but I imagine that British Rail will use and enhance the existing facilities in Cardiff. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman specifying exactly where in Cardiff it will be.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): If Speedlink is to close in Wales next week as is Speedlink in England, how much more freight will come across the new and old bridge——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The amendment deals with consultations in respect of the levying of tolls. What has that to do with——

Mr. Snape: If you stop interrupting for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall tell you. It is no good interrupting the rest of us if you allow the Minister to proceed. I am asking the Minister whether, as Speedlink in Wales is closing and as most of the traffic presently carried by rail will cross the new and old Severn bridge, how much will that cost the taxpayer in both countries?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to the consequence of the closure of Speedlink. Well over half of the volume of freight will continue to be carried by train, but some will be lost. British Rail has not disguised that fact. About 6 million tonnes in total will be hauled in the first year from the nine terminals. I cannot give him the estimate for Cardiff, but I shall write to him.

When the hon. Member for Torfaen proposed the amendment, which I urge the House to resist, he argued —and I agree—that the need for the bridge was unquestionable because it would double the capacity for road traffic between England and Wales.

The principle of tolling was accepted by a Labour Government about 25 years ago when the first Severn bridge was constructed. The hon. Member for Torfaen rightly argued or postulated that if the debt were written off after consultation with the local authorities—we are talking about £120 million—tolls could be reduced during the period between commencement of construction of the second bridge and the opening of it, and thereafter. There would, however, be a loss to the Exchequer of about £120 million—£62 million initially and then the balance with interest at 6 per cent. in real terms at the end of the tolling period. That is a matter of judgment, and the Government have decided that the receipt of £120 million to the Exchequer, albeit involving higher tolls than would otherwise be levied, is justified. The decision will allow the money to be recycled in the form of public expenditure. I cannot give a commitment on where the money will be spent or on what mode of transport, but it will be used for the benefit of the taxpayer.

I have been asked specific questions about the Humber bridge. Even in 1995, assuming that the tolls for cars, for example, are indexed to the rate of inflation on the Humber bridge, the one-way tolls will still be greater than those on the Severn bridge. The tolls for cars will be £2·10 on the Humber bridge, one way, and £1·90 on the Severn bridge. The same is true for two-axle heavy goods vehicles. In 1995, the tolls will be £8·60 on the Humber bridge and £5·70 on the Severn bridge. The Humber bridge is an exception, as it were. Even in 1995, the tolls will be higher on that bridge under the assumptions that I have outlined.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic did not suggest that there was a proposal to write off all the debt on the Humber bridge. In due course details will emerge of the debt that must remain that will be serviced by tolls. At that stage it will be possible to draw an exact comparison between the Severn bridge, with £120 million not written off, and the Humber bridge.

The hon. Members for Torfaen and for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) argued that there should be local public inquiries. There are three categories of toll increase. The first is the stepped increase on the existing bridge between next year, when I hope that construction will start, and 1995. The schedule is provided for in the Bill, and I believe that no public inquiries are necessary. Parliament will make a decision. Secondly, the increasing of the tolls, once the second bridge is completed, will be limited to the retail prices index each year. That is provided for in the Bill, and there is no need for a local public inquiry. Thirdly, there are the four exceptional events that we discussed in Committee: exceptional cases if there were a change in legislation; a major change in the tax regimé; the European investment bank withdrawing its loan; or dispute over the title to the land over which the bridge was built. If a toll increase were needed in such an event, the Government would ask the House to pass an affirmative order.

With those reasoned arguments, as I consider them to be, I ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Murphy: An answer given yesterday during transport questions suggested that the Government's position on debts on estuarial crossings had altered considerably. Until yesterday, the Government had consistently resisted the recommendation of the Select Committee on Transport that the debts should be written off. It seems that yesterday there was a significant change in their position. Even if we are talking of only part of the debt in respect of the Humber bridge, and even though that crossing is an exceptional case, it seems that the Government's principle has been broken. We say that there is a case for reconsidering the debt on the Severn

[Mr. Murphy]

bridge so that tolls can be reduced. That would mean that, when the two Severn bridges are in operation, tolls will not have an adverse impact on the economy of south Wales.

The consultations to which the hon. Members for Chorley (Mr. Dover) and for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) referred will not delay the construction of the second bridge. As the Minister knows, they would relate to the four exceptional events to which he referred in his reply, and well after the bridge has been built.

If there are exceptional reasons why the Secretary of State should increase the tolls, as the law stands, public inquiries can be held, as they have been on three separate occasions. Although the Severn Bridge Tolls Act 1965 said that the principle of tolling should be accepted, it laid down the principle of local public inquiries. The Government say that a debate on an order in the House is sufficient to reflect local points. We believe that it is insufficient for the House simply to debate a small order late at night, perhaps for only an hour, because that is not the same as proper consultation involving local authorities and the other bodies that have been mentioned.

I do not see why the Government cannot accept the amendment, which would enable the local community to be involved, would place the spotlight on the local economy and would do nothing but good for the new bridges.

Amendment negatived.

10.45 pm

Mr. Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 3, line 34, after 'services', insert ', including policing services,'.

This is a probing amendment which follows debates in Committee on the relationship between the concessionaires, the Secretary of State and the police authorities.

As the House is aware, Avon and Somerset constabulary is responsible for the policing arrangements of the existing bridge. It is proposed that the Gwent police force will look after the new Severn crossing. We are concerned, and I know that Gwent county council is concerned, about the extra cost of policing the new Severn crossing. The chief constable says that it would require at least nine constables and three sergeants, eight traffic patrol constables, six civilian force control room operators, one motorway patrol car, one unit beat car, one unit base station at Chepstow, one motorway console and force control room and the upgrading of two police stations. In total, a manpower cost of an extra £400,000 a year and other resource requirements amounting to £350,00 a year would fall on the relatively small police force in Gwent.

It is feared, given the present position of local government finance and as poll tax capping will apply to all Welsh local authorities from next year, that if Gwent county council were to input that extra cost there could be implications for poll tax payers in Gwent.

To that end, in July 1990, Gwent county council wrote to the Home Office asking whether any special arrangements will be made to fund the extra responsibilities that will fall on the Gwent police force. In reply, a Home Office official said:

"As the responsibility for policing the bridge was requested by the Chief Constable, it seems reasonable that the cost should fall to Gwent Police Authority."

That is highly unreasonable. The extra costs that will fall on Gwent police, especially the manpower costs, should be met by the Home Office. People in Gwent are concerned that all the extra money that will be spent on policing the new bridge will have detrimental implications for policing the county's towns and villages.

I hope that when the Minister of State, Welsh Office replies he will reinforce the point that was made in Committee by the Minister for Roads and Traffic that special arrangements will be made and that the poll tax payers of Gwent will not have to pay more to police the second Severn crossing.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): I repeat the assurance that my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic gave in Committee that the additional responsibilities for policing will be taken into account for public expenditure purposes. However, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that there is no reason to change the normal rules for meeting policing costs for the scheme, and I cannot agree to do so.

The hon. Gentleman is one step ahead of me in that he appears to have fairly precise figures for the cost of policing the new bridge. I am not as advantaged as he is. I am told that the cost of policing the new bridge—and, indeed, the existing bridge—cannot be separated from costs incurred in normal policing not just of the bridges but of the approach roads. Be that as it may, the policing of the highways will be carried out in the normal way under the normal arrangements and there is certainly no need for any special provision in the Bill, just as no such provision is made in the Severn Bridge Tolls Act 1965 or the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Act 1988.

The costs of policing the new bridge and its approach roads will be met in exactly the same way as those for the existing bridge and for every other stretch of motorway and trunk road. If the authorities concerned feel that they will be put to additional policing costs as a result of the Bill, they will no doubt voice those concerns to my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In a welcome moment of frankness, the Minister confessed that my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) was one step ahead of the Government in his knowledge of the bridge.

Wales has always regarded the Severn bridge as a mixed blessing and has been rightly cynical about its financing. It was the poet Harri Webb who said of the opening of the Severn bridge, with Wales and England linked for the first time,

"Two lands at last connected
Across the Severn wide
But all the tolls collected
Upon the English side."

Although every sensible person welcomed the bridge, it has proved a mixed blessing in every possible way. As my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) pointed out, there are great advantages in improving the communications system but, sadly, in this case, the effects of the improved communications have been felt in the heart of the country, not at the edges of the communications system. The advantages have flown towards centres of commerce in the west and south-east of England. With the coming of the bridge, many firms that had previously served only Wales found that they could base their headquarters in England and so both serve the west of England and continue to serve Wales, albeit from the other side.

There have been gains and losses. The true story of the Severn bridge is not that it was inadequate in the short term but that it was shaken into early senility by lorries. The number of lorries using it increased far more rapidly than expected. The original cost of the bridge was not £62 million, as suggested, but about £14 million. [HON. MEMBERS: "£11 million."] It was £11 million for the Severn bridge and £14 million for the two bridges—the Wye and the Severn—and work in the surrounding areas. The costs increased because of the state of the bridge and because no controls were placed on the lorries crossing the bridge, many of them overloaded, which caused the problems with which we are still dealing today. Even today, only three of the lanes are open.

The Gwent police have long had a sense of grievance against the Government. For many years, supported by the police committee, the local people and the chief constable, they have demanded an increase in their numbers. All six hon. Members representing Gwent constituencies have presented their case, asking for the full complement of police in Gwent. Each year, the complement has been denied by the Government.

There can be no question but that the Bill will place an increased burden on the Gwent police. We are told that the Government will be "taking the matter into account." We are all familiar with that phrase. We have heard it many times from Governments making settlements to local

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

authorities, and it often means that the decision is invisible in the final total amount allocated to an authority—in this case Gwent—and that there is no increase in that total.

Like all my hon. Friends, I strongly support the amendment. The new bridge and the increased policing that will be required will be an increased burden on the poll tax payers of Gwent and will mean that Gwent police will have less time to deal with their other important functions of keeping up their splendid record and splendid crime clear-up rate.

Mr. Murphy: With one exception, I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has said. The exception is in relation to Mr. Harri Webb, whose poetry is better than his politics. Some years ago, he tried to become the Member for Parliament for my constituency and, happily, failed.

The Minister has not reassured us because we are talking about an extra £750,000—£0·75 million—over and above the present cost of policing the county of Gwent. The second Severn bridge is a novel venture which will involve a lot of extra cost. As my hon. Friend has said, we do not want that extra money to come out of the Gwent police authority's budget for ordinary policing costs. I hope that the reassurances that we will be given in the weeks and months to come will be much firmer than those given by the Minister of State this evening.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I do not think that I can take matters much further except to agree with the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) about Harri Webb's poetic errors. This time round, the toll plaza will be on the Welsh side.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about Gwent police and its duties in respect of the new bridge, but I remind him that it is expected that the Avon police force will continue to maintain the motorway leading up to the existing bridge and, on the Department's behalf, will maintain the new approach roads on the Avon side.

Mr. Murphy: The Avon and Somerset constabulary will be policing a smaller bridge with an authority that is double the size of that in Gwent.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I can only repeat the assurance that was given in Committee.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 19

TERMINATION OF CONCESSION AGREEMENT

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 12, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) If the concession agreement is rendered unworkable as a result of any change in legislation, and the concession agreement is thereby terminated, no compensation shall be payable by the Secretary of State to the concessionaire.'.

The amendment seeks to remove the obligation on the Government of the day to hold an unlimited liability to underwrite the private company that is proposing to build the second Severn crossing. I shall not repeat the arguments about the inadequacies of the current Severn crossing or the importance of having a second crossing that can provide communication links across the Severn, but it is important to put on record the fact that the Government have made assumptions about transport policy and especially about the amount of freight traffic that will be carried on roads in the future. Furthermore, they have built those assumptions into the concessionary agreement that they are proposing to make with the private company. That agreement sets tolls for the crossing over a specified period so that the company can meet its obligations to its financiers and, presumably, make a profit. Those assumptions, and the ability of the company to recoup the money that it had invested, could be adversely affected by an incoming Government—I hope a Labour Government—with an environmentally friendly transport policy seeking to shift road traffic on to the railways.

11 pm

In notes provided in Committee on the concessionary agreement, hon. Members were informed that the agreement could become invalid, with the possibility, first, of compensation being paid to the private company and, secondly, of the Government of the day becoming liable to accept all the debts and running costs of the company under certain circumstances. That might happen if the Bill was amended, if an undertaking was given to a third party during the measure's passage through Parliament or if a change occurred in United Kingdom or EC legislation which had a substantial effect on the second Severn crossing company, such as the introduction of legislation which shifted freight transport from road to rail.

Reference was also made to a possible change in the tax regime which had a material effect on the second crossing. For example, a future Government, of whichever party, might deem it necessary to introduce a new tax regime designed to discourage excessive road traffic. That change might have an effect on the ability of the company to raise the necessary tolls to cover its costs.

At our first Committee sitting, I asked the Minister whether a change in tax regime on an environmental basis to encourage traffic from road to rail would represent a breach of the concessionary agreement and leave the Government of the day open to a claim for compensation by the company. I also asked whether the introduction of legislation which had the effect of shifting freight from road to rail would represent such a breach.

Those are important issues. All political parties pledge themselves to improving, and accept that excessive road traffic is detrimental to, the environment. It seems crazy, therefore, that the Government should give undertakings to a private company which would protect that company from legislation that might be introduced by a future Government to protect the environment.

In Committee, the Minister circulated to Members his response to a number of questions that had been asked. If, whatever the cause, less traffic used the second crossing, the company's initial response would, no doubt, be to apply for an increase in tolls. If the Government of the day refused to allow that increase, the question would arise, according to the Minister, whether the concession was still viable and whether, within the permitted time, the company could recoup its investments and liabilities. If the company deemed that it could not do so, the concessionary agreement would be terminated immediately unless the Government of the day decided to meet the additional costs of the second Severn river crossing. If they failed to meet those additional costs, the entire liability of the second Severn river crossing—the debt, running costs,

management and everything for which the company was liable as a direct result of sponsoring the crossing—would automatically become the Government's liability.

I disagree with that principle. It is not for the Government to commit this nation, particularly south Wales and the Avon and Wiltshire area, to suffer heavy road transport in perpetuity by locking us into an agreement which it is too expensive, or the concessions do not allow us, to get out of. If the Government believed in their ideology of a free market, they would say to the company, "This is the basis on which, as a private company on the open market, you take on a second Severn river crossing. If you fail to meet your costs and make your profits, that is your hardship as a private company." It is wrong for the Government totally to underwrtie those costs. It is also unacceptable that the Government should seek to undermine possible future legislation to protect the environment.

The amendment would make it crystal clear that no compensation would be payable by the Secretary of State to the second Severn river crossing company should such circumstances arise as a result of a change in legislation instituted by this House or the EC.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful for the opportunity to reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) has said in her important contribution.

It is fair to say that we are already in that possible new environment. In one of those U-turns that the Government have been making since the former Prime Minister left office and Ministers have felt freer to introduce new initiatives, the Secretary of State for Transport said that he now believes in revitalising and regenerating the railways and pushing more freight from the roads to the railways.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be far more enlightening if the Minister would tell us exactly where the rail freight depot is to go in south Wales? That would make the issue much clearer.

Mr. Morgan: Yes. Since we raised that point earlier, and as a result of the previous amendment on policing, the Avon and Somerset CID and the Gwent CID are now searching Cardiff to discover the whereabouts of the new freight depot.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I understand that the new depot will be at Pengam, but the Department has already promised to write.

Mr. Morgan: That is undoubtedly the best place for a road-rail interchange in south Wales, and I am grateful for the information.

If the Secretary of State for Transport meant what he said in his speech to the 1990 Conservative party conference, and has now become a believer in the railways, and if that is now part of the Government's policy, is the would-be concessionaire, GTM-Laing, already looking to the Government to underwrite what might happen when the Secretary of State gets round to transforming his speech into policies? The concessionaires are already negotiating with the Department of Transport for a change in the terms of the concession on the ground that if the Government are thinking of shifting so much freight transport from the roads to rail—by subsidy, by regulation and by policy—they will need such a change.

Mr. Snape: Is my hon. Friend aware that whatever the Secretary of State says is merely so much rhetoric? The Government's policy is quite the reverse. Traffic is being transferred within the next week from rail to road. The amendment merely seeks guidance from the Government on whether their rhetoric will ever be translated into action to move freight from the roads to rail.

Mr. Morgan: I agree that the Government have led the country in that direction over the past 12 years. Now we are being told—not in the House of Commons, however—that the programme is to be put into reverse, and that there will be an attempt to revitalise the railway sector. If so, are the Government actively re-examining the terms of the concession; or have the concessionaires decided that the Secretary of State's major speech, reversing 12 years of Government policy, is just so much wind and they do not need to worry about it? In that case, what did the speech mean?

If the concessionaires have raised these questions with the Minister, in what way might the concession be altered to cover the underwriting in respect of future changes once the bridge is built? Will there be a smaller second Severn crossing because of the Government's change of policy in favour of rail? Would the bridge still be viable then?

The Secretary of State has not discussed these matters in the House, but I hope that the Minister of State will be frank with us and will tell us what the Government have in mind in the context of this Bill.

Mr. Dover: It ill becomes the supporters of the amendment to say that this is one of the bases on which the agreement could be terminated. Why do not they look at the other three grounds on which it could be terminated? The concessionaires have negotiated, in lengthy discussions with the Government and the Department, exactly the terms for any termination of the contract; and it is irresponsible to table such an amendment at this late stage. A slight movement of freight from road to rail will only mean that the time over which the tolls will be collected will be slightly extended. That will be to the detriment of the people of Wales who travel by road. There is enough elasticity in the agreement already and it is stupid to expect to be able suddenly to renegotiate in the House the grounds on which the agreement could be terminated.

There is a solid agreement. We should think ourselves fortunate that these companies have stuck out their necks to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds over decades and taken on a high degree of risk. Knowing as I do the integrity of the firms, I should be most surprised if they had come to the Department and accused it of changing the goalposts. We should chuck out the amendment forthwith.

Mr. Livsey: I strongly support the amendment so eloquently moved by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo). Who are we to say what the demands on the road system will be in the next century? I forecast that the M4 will be jammed with traffic by the year 2000. Between Swindon and London it already is. This plan will filter more and more traffic on to the M4. The alternative, of an efficient and fast rail freight and rail passenger service, will become an absolute necessity for the country. The hon. Member for Bristol, South said that we must not give the concessionaires a blank cheque. Modes of transport will change and trains will become a great deal faster than vehicles using the M4 or the new Severn bridge.

[Mr. Livsey]

Rail will become much more attractive for goods and passengers and will be far more environmentally friendly. We need the safeguards in the amendment and are right to be forward looking.

11.15 pm

Mr. Snape: The amendment's aims are clear, contrary to what the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) said in his astonishing speech. If the Secretary of State's rhetoric means anything, the Government, who we hope will not be in office for much longer, intend to transfer freight from road to rail. In two interventions I have said that within the next week there will be a substantial transfer of freight the other way because of the closure of the Speedlink network.

The amendment seeks to establish whether the concessionaires will have a financial claim on this or any successor Government and whether the Secretary of State's rhetoric will be translated into reality. We confidently expect to form the next Government and we shall take action on the environment and see that the under-utilised rail network is boosted by the transfer of freight from road to rail.

The amendment asks a simple question: if the happy situation outlined by the Secretary of State comes to pass, will the concessionaires have any fiscal claim on this or any other Government? Will the agreement tie the hands of this or any future Government so that if we try more sensibly to use the rail facilities compensation will have to be paid to the concessionaires? I cannot understand the complaints of the hon. Member for Chorley. He is an expert in these matters and some of us remember his distinguished service on the Greater London council.

We seek to ascertain whether the taxpayer will be liable to pay the concessionaires a not inconsiderable sum if the environmental transfer that all hon. Members appear to want is a reasonable proposition. We did not get much of an answer in Committee and I hope that the Minister will tell us whether the Government are serious about transferring freight. If they are, how much will it cost the taxpayer under the terms of the agreement?

Mr. Freeman: The amendment can be seen as abrogating the concession agreement before construction starts. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) did not touch on that, but it was raised in Committee. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) said that a Labour Government would not cancel the bridge or seek to abrogate the concession agreement after Royal Assent of the Bill. He said that the compensation, which is currently about £20 million—the amount spent by the concessionaires on preparing designs and other studies—would be payable by the Government if they abrogated the agreement. He felt that that would make it undesirable to cancel the concession agreement.

The hon. Lady asked what the liabilities of the Government would be if the bridge had been constructed, and a change in the legislative ground rules had a substantial effect on the viability of the bridge and the concession were terminated. In Committee, I spelt out clearly the conditions for exceptional increases in tolls, and one was a major change in legislation that had a substantial effect on the viability of the operation. I cannot speculate as to whether our proposed Bill to privatise British Rail and allow free access to all rail tracks by private sector freight operators will have that effect. It depends on when the Bill is presented, and what the effects of it will be.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has made it plain that he understands that 90 per cent. of freight is carried by road and 10 per cent. by rail. Irrespective of the short-term implications of converting wagon load Speedlink traffic into train load, which makes good, sound commercial sense—a logic that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East understands and accepts—it will lose a modest proportion of previous wagon load traffic that should be collected by road and taken to a rail head for transhipment by train load long distances—which is where rail road has the competitive advantage.

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Freeman: I do not intend to delay the House long.

Mr. Snape: Nor do I, but I do not wish the Minister to mislead the House. Road has the advantage because, to quote that well-used cliche, there is not a level playing field. The road haulage business does not pay its true costs, as the Minister knows. The Government insist that rail freight breaks even, taking one year with another, so there is a transfer of freight from rail to road. We still want an answer as to whether, under the terms of the concession, a sensible implementation of the policy that the Government supposedly advocate, as the Opposition do, would breach that agreement. If it does, how much will that cost the taxpayer?

Mr. Freeman: I tried to answer that point. I said that as and when primary legislation is laid before the House to permit free access to the tracks of British Rail and other rail owners and operators, a judgment will have to be made. I shall not speculate as to whether that will be classified as a major change in the ground rules, permitting the concessionaire to ask for an increase in tolls. It is impossible to speculate because that will be a matter for the next Parliament.

However, I can spell out the procedure. There would be an application to increase the tolls, which would come before the House on an affirmative order. If that were not passed by the House, the concession would terminate, and the Government would have to take over the assets—the bridge—and the liabilities. The hon. Lady may be concerned about that, and her amendment, which I advise the House to resist, implies that there is some doubt about the taking over of the liabilities. However, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is most anxious to bring the private sector into building the road and rail infrastructure, will not be able to tap those funds from the private sector if the amendment were passed.

The amendment would cloud the ability of any Government to raise much-needed finance from the private sector. It is a risky business building such projects as the Severn bridge, the Dartford to Thurrock crossing or the Birmingham northern relief road. Construction and maintenance costs get out of hand, the traffic might not materialise. If the House were to change the legislative ground rules, it would only be right that, if the concession terminates, the Government should take over not only assets but the liabilities.

Ms. Primarolo: I draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 12 of the notes that he circulated in Committee. In addition to taking over the liabilities and the running of the bridge, which we understand because it is an extension of the M4 motorway and it would be difficult to cross the river Severn without the bridge, he said:

"SRC would be contractually entitled to a certain degree of compensation for its adverse financial effects."

I read that to mean over and above taking on the liabilities, and that is what I was specifically asking about.

Mr. Freeman: Perhaps I can enlighten the hon. Lady. There may be a lack of clarity in the note. It means that if there is a change in the legislative ground rules and the concessionaire's financial calculations go awry and he seeks some form of financial compensation, that would come principally from an increase in the tolls. That is how the concessionaire would seek to correct the situation. That is what is meant by compensation. If the House refused to agree to the increase in tolls and as a practical matter that meant that the concession therefore terminated, the Government would take over the bridge and the liabilities and continue to toll.

Ms. Primarolo: In that case, the Minister is saying that the House would have no option but to accept the company's application for an increased toll if it applied to us on the basis that it needed an increased toll because changes in the Government's transport policy had adversely affected its ability to raise the finance necessary. If we refused that toll and a reduction of the concession was not feasible, we would be liable for compensation. That is what the Minister says in the note. Therefore, we have no choice but to agree to the toll increase if the company says that our legislation has adversely affected its ability to run the bridge viably.

Mr. Freeman: If the House in its wisdom rejected the affirmative order and the concession terminated, the Government would take over the bridge, its assets and liabilities, and presumably manage and toll it until the liabilities had been discharged. That does not represent damages paid out in cash to the concessionaire, if that is what the hon. Lady thinks. It is the Government taking over the bridge, standing in the shoes of the concessionaire and then managing its completion.

Mr. Morgan: The Minister made blood-curdling threats about possible effects on the policies of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and his hopes as part of Labour's transport policy to have joint ventures with the private sector. But he did not answer my question about what the speech made by the Secretary of State for Transport means with regard to this concession. Is it that the concessionaires do not believe a word that the Secretary of State for Transport said when he announced this great reversal of years of policy favouring road over rail to a policy favouring rail over road, or do they think that it does mean something, in which case it has a bearing on the way in which they see their concession and the legislative environment which now must be in prospect if the Secretary of State's speech means anything? That is a public announcement by the Minister's Government, not by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. What does it mean for this concession?

Mr. Freeman: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to read my right hon. and learned Friend's speech. He talked in part about future legislation and I shall not speculate on whether that would represent a substantial change in the ground rules. I hope that with those reasoned explanations the House will resist the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

11.29 pm

Mr. Murphy: The Opposition welcome the crossing, because of the problems of the present bridge and because of its vital significance to Wales's economy in particular; it is, after all, our economic lifeline. None the less, I think that the Minister should take note of what has been said this evening, because of the importance of the bridge in the context of a much wider transport policy. What happens to railways, to motorways, to roads generally and to the Severn bridge is interlinked, and is a significant aspect of both the Welsh economy and the Welsh people's quality of life.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) pointed out, this is a novel adventure—a unique combination of private and public sector money. That is why, in Committee, we considered various vital safeguards. We examined the question of tolls, the debt problem, public inquiries and local consultation; we considered the future of the staff who are involved with the existing Severn bridge, and the environmental impact on both the English and the Welsh sides.

The Bill will now go to the other place, where it will be considered—as it was in the House of Commons—by a special Select Committee. We hope that the Committee will look again at those safeguards, and will consider some of the doubts that we have expressed with a view to improving the Welsh economy and quality of life.

We believe that this move is right for the Welsh economy; but we also believe that any mistakes now could cost millions in the future.

11.31 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Like the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), I believe that the Bill is generally welcomed. As he recognised, however, it will affect both sides of the Bristol channel, and, in particular, traffic patterns in my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope).

In Committee, the Government gave a number of undertakings that were very welcome to my constituents. Especially welcome was the commitment that the Department of Transport would give all possible assistance to the eventual construction of the much-needed all-directions interchange at Hallen. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for pointing out a minor error that I made in Committee. I said, on the basis of information that I had received, that the proposed interchange would be entirely within my constituency; in fact, it also affects that of my right hon. Friend.

My constituents still fear that, even following the construction of the desired interchange, there will be a considerable increase in traffic affecting the western end of my constituency. I hope that my right hon. and learned

[Mr. Michael Stern]

Friend the Secretary of State will extend the undertaking that he has already given, and that the Department will not only facilitate the construction of the interchange but—perhaps more important—consider alternate traffic patterns to avert what will otherwise be a great increase in traffic in Avonmouth and its surroundings owing to the industrial development that will inevitably result from the Bill.

11.33 pm

Mr. Livsey: My party strongly supports the building of the second Severn crossing. However, some of what the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) has said about traffic congestion should be noted. We need an integrated transport system, involving both roads and rail. The crossing should form part of the building bricks of a truly integrated system, bringing rail much more to the fore.

I hope that in the future, when we see the growth in road traffic in particular, and the effect that it will have on our environment, we shall have much more enlightened policies, which will encourage investment in rail as well as roads. Cost-benefit analysis should be applied to rail investment, just as it is to road investment.

11.34 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I also welcome the construction of the second Severn bridge. However, I hope that the House will realise that many of my constituents who live in the area will suffer a great deal as a result of the building of the bridge because of the approach roads which go through, particularly, the parish of Pilning and Severn Beach.

I should like to express my gratitude to the Minister and the Department for the help that they have given in trying to alleviate the inevitably difficult consequences of the building of the approach roads and the bridge. I hope that, as the Minister said in Committee, they will continue to be as helpful as possible in alleviating the conditions that are brought about by the bridge.

In Committee, which the Social and Liberal Democrats did not attend, some Labour Members were dubious about the idea of tolls and some said that they were against them. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have never said that they would do away with tolls or reduce them substantially. On the contrary, as with the previous Labour Government, they seem to support the continuation of tolls. Some Back-Bench Members who have advocated doing away with tolls should not be allowed to get away with it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

BUILDING SOCIETIES

That the draft Building Societies Act 1986 (Continuance of section 41) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 3rd June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House I shall put together the Questions on the motions on agriculture to approve the statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

AGRICULTURE

That the Farm Diversification Grant (Variation) (No. 2) Scheme 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1339), dated 6th June 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th June, be approved.

That the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) Scheme 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1338), dated 6th June 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th June, be approved.

That the draft Farm and Conservation Grant Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 10th June, be approved.

That the draft Farm Woodland (Variation) Scheme 1991, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved —*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

RATES OF DUTY ON MINERAL OILS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4822/91, relating to rates of excise duty on mineral oils.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Land Trespass (Avon)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

11.36 pm

Mr. Jack Aspinwall (Wansdyke): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate this debate, and I know that I am supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) who could not be here. I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) in his place, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward). I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on the award of a well-deserved OBE.

I have had a great deal of help and support in preparing for the debate from the National Farmers Union, Kingswood borough council and Wansdyke district council. I am pleased that I have an opportunity to bring before the House examples of the distress, heartache, fear and intimidation that have been present in the Avon county area, particularly in my constituency of Wansdyke. Those problems have intensified during the past few weeks. In the area overall there have been nearly 3,000 hippies. I use that word for want of a better one, since my constituents have variously described them in more colourful language.

Last Saturday I went to see the aftermath of a hippie visitation in the beautiful village of Carlingcott, near Peasedown St. John. After travelling through the picturesque countryside to get to the village, I passed many farms and premises literally under siege. Entrances to land had been blocked with rubbish skips and farm equipment and there were earth and stone embankments across farm gates, all imposing a scar on the countryside.

Such action is generated by fear of entry of the hippies and the resulting filth and depredation left behind after their departure. The fields at Carlingcott were churned up and there were burnt-out cars, mounds of rubbish and the remains of human and animal excreta from over 2,000 people and many animals. The farmer who rented the land has lost his grass keep and the work required on the site to reinstate it is expensive. This is just one incident in many.

Wansdyke district council has partly cleaned up the roads around the village and the people of Carlingcott and a wide surrounding area have breathed a sigh of relief, having suffered a great deal of noise, intimidation and intrusion into their normally peaceful lives.

Another site in my constituency, at Charmy Down near Bath, was invaded by hippies. A similar process took place, commencing on Wednesday 29 May. The Charmy Down incident was perhaps more serious, in that human and animal pollution affected a water catchment area which partly supplied Bath, and Wessex Water was reported as having diverted the flow of springs from a reservoir in order to prevent contamination. In both areas, there were reports of theft, intimidation, damage and loud noise, which all added to the inconvenience to, and total misery of, my constituents, making normal life impossible.

I come to the core of the problem—how the law operates to deal with hippies who, unauthorised, occupy sites and exploit the law to the last minute, causing huge expense not only to private landowners and farmers but to taxpayers and community charge payers. The cost is hundreds of thousands of pounds and the effectiveness of the police to deal with crime is considerably weakened, because of the extra commitments imposed on them by the hippies.

There appear to be two ways of removing people from sites where an intrusion has taken place. The first is for the landowner to apply to a court for an order of possession. The second is for the police to deal with the problem under section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986.

The process to take effective, immediate action to remove hippies is a legal minefield. The hippies have an extremely good intelligence service, and the site at Carlingcott, near Peasedown St. John, is a good example. Carlingcott was originally occupied by a small number of hippies who sounded out the local scene and then there was an influx of others on to the land. It was certainly known that this legally knowledgable group, who used citizen band radios and mobile telephones and mobile fax machines, carried out a well-planned operation. In the end, it became extremely difficult to enforce the law.

Land may be identified which is the subject of a legal dispute or a complexity of byelaws and regulations. Before legal action can be initiated, extensive research may be required into byelaws, local acts and ancient charters. That all has a delaying effect on the legal process. The landowner may go to considerable expense, only to find that on the appointed day, when the bailiffs go in to evict, the hippies simply move to another site and cause similar problems somewhere else. It is impossible to get, from a group of people who live on the edge of, or above, the law, recompense for physical damage or financial loss incurred.

Section 39 of the Public Order Act gives the police the power to deal with trespassers. It must be remembered, though, that the Act does not place the police under a duty to act; it only gives them a power to direct trespassers to leave land and arrest them if they fail to do so without reasonable excuse as soon as it is reasonably practicable.

The effect is that up to 3,000 people can congregate on a site, and the police need hundreds of officers and equipment to deal with the problem. If large numbers of hippies decide that they will not move, it is an impossible situation. If, for example, 1,000 men were arrested, hundreds of women and many children would be left on the site. A duty of care would be placed on the local authorities to deal with the attendant problem of the women, children and animals.

If the men decided to plead not guilty before a court, it is likely that under the Bail Act 1976 they would be bailed and merely sent back to the site, and the trouble would continue. That cannot be allowed to continue, and there has to be a change in the law even to allow a court or a judge to visit a site and to deal swiftly with the law-breakers before large numbers of people can gather. The special procedures also take valuable time and need speeding up.

I welcome the review of section 39. I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) asked the Home Secretary in a parliamentary question whether he had completed his evaluation of section 39. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a statement on 22 May 1991, but the problem remains and the Act fails to deal with it at its roots. All that has happened is that the powers have been defined in writing and a leaflet has been published which outlines the civil remedies open to landowners. However, that does nothing to alter the position.

[Mr. Jack Aspinwall]

I now deal with what has become a major problem in the Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled county of Avon—the failure of the county council to take positive steps to remove hippies, travellers, gipsies or whatever one calls the various groups of itinerants. The county has a duty of care to all the people who live in it. Many long-suffering residents and community charge payers are subject to a massive intrusion into their lives because the county council refuses to take action as a landowner to remove the itinerants from its land. I agree that the county council has not provided the necessary number of sites under the Caravan Sites Act 1968, but there is no reason why people should be subject to difficulties because of the county council's failure to act.

The hippies have different needs from those of the gipsies and tinkers whose requirements under the Caravan Sites Act are small supervised units. It cannot be beyond the bounds of possibility for the Home Office and the Departments of the Environment and Social Security to get together to consider ways and means of providing transit sites for people who could be termed hippies or travellers, who move around for part of the year and who cause tremendous problems. It should be possible to find sites away from human habitation, where proper sanitary facilities can be provided and where there will be no inconvenience to local people.

It is right that sites should be provided for the group of people known as gipsies, but it is unrealistic to believe that the occupiers of those sites can forcibly be integrated into communities of people who also have rights and who wish merely to enjoy their homes and their lives peaceably.

The duties imposed on the police and the costs involved place the police in an impossible position. I congratulate the Avon and Somerset constabulary on the way in which it has dealt with many difficult situations, taking great care to avoid confrontation which would not be to the benefit of the public but, at the same time, using whatever powers are available to it to alleviate a series of difficult incidents.

The basic problem is that of large numbers of people gathering in an uncontrolled way. There are people who live on the edge of the law and who intimidate others. The problem must be solved because innocent people should not have to bear legal costs or the costs of damage to their land and property which, in many cases, is long standing. Sanctions should be imposed, perhaps on social security benefits: no readiness for work and no co-operation mean no girocheque. There should be sanctions to prevent a large number of vehicles gathering, which would eventually become uncontrollable. Sites should be provided for pop festivals in remote parts of the country to enable young people to enjoy themselves in proper conditions with adequate facilities.

There should be a speeding up of the legal process to stop the huge waste of the resources of the police, local councils and private landowners that is created by the activities of hippies. Much can be achieved if only the difficulties that have been experienced by my constituents and other law-abiding citizens are recognised and urgent action is taken. Section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 is not effective and consequently will not solve the extreme social problem that I have outlined.

Consideration should be given to imposing a duty on the police to act. Designation is not the answer. If such a duty is imposed, powers should be given to local authorities to deal with the matters that arise, such as the towing away of vehicles and caravans, the welfare of women, children and animals and the storage and disposal of chattels. People should not have an imposition placed upon them that seriously damages their quality of life.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I support my hon. Friend in all that he is saying, including his strictures on the failure of Avon county council. I am sure that he is aware that section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 is especially difficult to interpret when common land is involved. There have been the most appalling invasions of Sodbury common in recent years, and it is difficult to express the consequences for the local inhabitants. We know that the law is broken, and the problem is how to enforce it. We need a task force comprised of the police and local authority employees that is capable of dealing with the invasions and tackling the many belligerent people who gather on the occasions that my hon. Friend has described.

Mr. Aspinwall: My right hon. Friend has outlined the serious problems in his constituency. It is unfortunate that the action that ensues is apparently slow and ponderous. Although the police have powers under section 39, those powers are used unevenly. The decision whether to act is a matter of discretion for the chief constable whose force is involved. The present state of affairs cannot continue. I know that my right hon. Friend's constituents have suffered deeply as a result of the influx of large numbers of people, many of whom are intent on causing a great deal of inconvenience and trouble.

11.52 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I take it that the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) has the leave of the hon. Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall) and that of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department to participate in the debate.

Mr. Hayward: I wish to intervene only briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall) has taken the opportunity to raise matters of concern for hon. Members who represent Avon constituencies. I thank him for his comments about me.

On the border of our constituencies, as my hon. Friend well knows, is an area that is known as Firework farm. The property is owned by Avon county council, and it flatly refuses to take action to evict the people who are currently on the site. That highlights the problems that are faced by our constituents—law-abiding citizens who wish to go about their day-to-day lives unhindered by others. At present, they have virtually to nail down all their possessions. They cannot leave their houses unattended for fear that their property will be removed from washing lines, along with their front doors and the contents of their garages. It is important that the county council is encouraged to take action as and where appropriate in support of the ordinary law-abiding citizen.

I echo my hon. Friend's comments about the police, who face an appallingly difficult task. I recently witnessed the problems that they face at Firework farm. I arrived in

the middle of a police operation in which officers were trying to arrest individuals who were believed to have stolen property from local residents. The police do a good job in the circumstances, but the law and the actions of others are not always as supportive as they might be.

11.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall) on his success in raising a sensitive issue. Trespass always gives rise to strong feelings, and I know that during the weeks of the summer solstice, especially, there are many areas, including my hon. Friend's constituency, that experience an influx of travellers and hippies. That can be distressing and troublesome to local residents. My hon. Friend described the situation graphically, and he had powerful support from my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward).

Section 39, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke referred, was conceived during the passage of the Public Order Bill in response to the mass invasions of land in and around Stonehenge in the summer of 1986. Although the matter at issue is the use of section 39, it must be seen in context. It is one of a number of remedies that are available to landowners for dealing with trespass on land by those who intend to stay there. The majority of cases of trespass are resolved, as they should be, either informally or in the civil courts. Trespass on land is a civil tort rather than a criminal offence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke referred to the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which has an important role to play. It places a duty on local authorities to provide official sites for gipsies, hippies or people of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, in their area. Once a local authority has become designated under the Act, it has a quick-acting criminal law power through the magistrates courts to move gipsies, hippies or other travelling folk from an unauthorised site, whether it be owned privately or by the local authority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke suggested that short-stay sites for hippies should be provided. That is a constructive idea, but such provision should be made not by the Home Office or the Department of the Environment but by local authorities, which must also provide gipsy sites in their area.

Section 39 gives the police the discretionary power to direct trespassers to leave land only where trespassers have entered the land as trespassers and have the common purpose of residing there, where the occupier, or someone on his behalf, has asked them to leave, where any of the trespassers has been threatening or abusive to the occupier, where they have caused damage or where they have brought 12 or more vehicles on to the land. The section does not make trespass a criminal offence, but it is an offence for a trespasser not to leave the land after a direction has been given or, having left, to return as a trespasser within three months.

Section 39 is not a substitute for normal civil procedures, nor should local authorities see it as a means of evading their statutory duty to provide official sites. It provides a limited criminal sanction to deal with aggravated trespass.

In October 1989, the then Home Secretary announced a public evaluation of section 39 to see how its relatively new powers were working. The Home Office received 30 representations from a range of gipsy or traveller groups, local authorities and their associations and representatives of landowners. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke said, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced his conclusions on 22 May this year. He concluded that more needed to be done to secure better understanding by all interested parties of the way in which the law should operate but that no change in the law was necessary.

At the same time as my right hon. Friend made his announcement, Home Office guidance was issued to the police on the application of section 39 and a leaflet was published in plain English setting out for landowners the main provisions of the law on trespass of land. A copy was placed in the Library. Additionally, it was announced that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment would continue to maintain the pressure on local authorities to meet their statutory duty to provide adequate numbers of sites for gipsies and travellers. The provision of sites is a vital factor in reducing the problem of trespass and in enabling the police to take the quick action that my hon. Friend is seeking.

Section 39 was intended to strike a careful balance between providing a quick and effective means of returning land to the occupier where there is aggravated trespass and not allowing the harassment of well-behaved gipsies for whom no official site provision has been made. Our review showed that there were no major gaps or weaknesses in the legislation, but that some confusion had arisen over the circumstances in which section 39 could and could not be used. The measures taken following our review of section 39, to which I have referred, should do much to remove that confusion and will, I believe, help landowners to find the most suitable remedy available to them in their particular circumstances.

The guidance to the police aims to provide a clear understanding of the matters that the police can be expected to take into account in deciding whether to give a direction to trespassers to leave land. The criteria include the consequences of giving a direction to leave to which my hon. Friend referred. For example, there might be further trespass nearby because of the lack of official sites. There is no virtue in shifting a problem from one back yard into a neighbouring back yard. They also include the consequences of not giving a direction to leave—for example, further damage or threatening behaviour or the disorder that might occur. The public order consequences of their actions are rightly to be taken into account by the police. Also to be considered are the personal circumstances of the trespassers. For example, there might be those whose well-being could be affected by an immediate move. There have been complaints about pregnant women or sick people being peremptorily removed, although that is not, I think, a factor in the sort of cases to which my hon. Friend referred. The criteria are not exhaustive and there will be local circumstances to be taken into account.

I must emphasise that, despite the issue of guidance, the decision whether to issue a direction to leave the land remains an operational one for the police. Despite what my hon. Friend has said, I do not believe that the decision how and where to use the powers that the law rightly gives

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

them can be taken out of their hands. The senior officer at the scene will take his decision in the light of all the circumstances in each particular case.

I come now to the application of section 39 in the Avon area, I know that the area has a seasonal influx of large groups of travellers who arrive to attend pop festivals and to celebrate, in their own way, the summer solstice. I understand from the chief constable of Avon and Somerset that section 39 has been used on a number of occasions and has worked well. I am told that in recent months it has been used successfully to deal with occupations of travellers at Doynton, Mangotsfield and Radstock. Once the police had issued a direction to leave, the travellers moved on without any undue delay.

My hon. Friend implied that section 39 lacks teeth because it cannot be applied where there is no authorised occupier. However, the main purpose of the section is to give back to the occupier the use of land on which trespassers are residing. If there is a nuisance from noise or pollution, as in some of the cases to which my hon. Friend referred, it can be dealt with by the local authority under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. If there is criminality—and I am talking not about simple trespass but about damage and about the kind of activities that my hon. Friend had in mind—the criminal law will, of course, bite.

In the case of unoccupied common land, mentioned in particular by my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon, I understand that action can be taken under the Commons Registration Act 1965 and that local authorities designated under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 can use the powers that they obtain under that Act to move gipsies, travellers and trespassers from such land. But the designation must be in place before they can do so. I believe that none of the local authorities in the Avon and Somerset police force area is designated under the 1968 Act and they may wish to reconsider—I put it no higher than that—the advantages of designation. Having heard what my hon. Friends have said, I believe that it is something to which close attention should be paid.

I do not pretend that section 39, even when seen as one of the range of remedies provided by the law to deal with the problems of trespass, will always work to the satisfaction of all parties. I can, however, say with some assurance that, since its introduction in 1986, section 39 has often proved an effective and useful addition to the legal remedies available. I am confident that the recent actions taken by the Home Office following our review of section 39 will be found helpful.

In conclusion, I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that several different and sometimes conflicting considerations have to be brought together when approaching the problems of trespass on land. Of course, gipsies, travelling folk and hippies, separately and collectively, have a responsibility to avoid creating a nuisance. Local authorities, crucially, have a duty to provide sites under the Caravan Sites Act. Landowners have their rights under the civil law. The police have a duty to exercise reasonably the discretion given them in the circumstances set out in section 39.

The Government, I believe, have set a framework of civil and criminal law within which most continuing disputes arising from trespass can be resolved and which strikes a reasonable balance between the interests concerned. I am afraid that not all the mercifully short-term problems to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke referred can effectively be dealt with in those terms—although the criminal acts that he described certainly can be as not all anti-social behaviour can be amenable to the law. However, I have no doubt that where there is damage and abuse, such as he has described, the courts can provide a remedy if the perpetrators can be properly identified.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL *[Lords]*

(By Order)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (HARBOURS) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Foreign-based Companies

1. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the application of his policy on takeovers by foreign-based, state-owned companies.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): I restated the Government's policy towards mergers involving state-controlled companies, whether British or foreign, in a speech on competition policy on 12 June. I will continue to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission acquisitions that I consider may lead to distortions in the market. Such distortions are most likely when an acquisition involves a large market share, a high degree of direct state control or evidence of past anti-competitive behaviour.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend think it right to allow foreign nationalised industries to buy up private British companies and then to use their privileged position and access to cheap capital unfairly to compete against British private companies?

Mr. Lilley: I certainly receive representations from many people in British industry who feel exactly as my hon. Friend does. That is why I shall continue to take the degree of state ownership into account when considering whether referrals should be made to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. That is an important aspect of national interest and improving the competitive market.

Ms. Mowlam: If the Secretary of State is prepared to make statements about takeovers of foreign-owned and state-owned companies, why is he unwilling to make a statement about ICI? It is no good the Secretary of State saying that it is a European Economic Community issue. As I went to Brussels last week, I know that the Community would welcome a statement on the Secretary of State's view on that issue.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady appears to be unaware that there has been no bid. It would be absurd for a Secretary of State to make a statement on a hypothetical bid. Nothing could be more certain to ensure that a Secretary of State has no power to intervene, even in circumstances where, at its discretion, the European Community referred a merger back to the state. If he made a statement and was then ruled by the courts to have fettered his discretion in advance, he would be utterly powerless.

Compact Discs

2. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the rate of growth in the production of compact discs in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): Production of compact discs in the United Kingdom rose from 1·1 million in 1985 to 78·5 million in 1990.

Mr. Coombs: The whole House will wish to congratulate a manufacturing industry of this country which has increased its output to such a remarkable extent in only six years. Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity also to congratulate the British manufacturers Nimbus and EMI on the excellence of their technology, and Chandos and Hyperion, not only on their excellent technology but on the fact that they have been pioneer recorders of British music?

Mr. Leigh: I know that my hon. Friend speaks up effectively for industry and business in his constituency, and he is right to draw attention to the success and growth rate of the compact disc industry. Because the industry is so new, it is meaningless to talk in terms of 135 per cent. compound rate of growth from 1985 to the present day. However, if one bears in mind that between 1989 and 1990 growth was 20 per cent., that shows a very healthy industry.

Mr. Tony Banks: The CD industry is not so new that it has not worked out how to price goods. Will the Minister examine the pricing structure within the industry, because CDs still cost an unacceptably high amount given the increased volume of manufacture? When he looks at that industry, will he have a word with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury who, I understand, has amassed a vast collection of CDs and is clearly trying to do for the price of CDs what Bunker Hunt did for silver?

Mr. Leigh: The price of CDs in the United Kingdom —clearly the hon. Gentleman is an expert—is about £10·99 or £11·99, which compares with about £12 in France, about £13 in Germany and about £12 in Japan. So it is not fair to say that there is overwhelming evidence that CDs are overpriced in this country. If there were evidence of a cartel, the Office of Fair Trading would be interested. It is conducting an informal inquiry into the music industry in general, but in the absence of any firm evidence of a cartel it would be inappropriate for the Department to intervene.

Investment

3. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of *(a)* United States and *(b)* Japanese investment in the EC came to the United Kingdom in the latest available year.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): It is estimated that the United Kingdom has 42 per cent. of United States investment in the European Community as at the end of 1990 and 39 per cent. of Japanese investment as at the end of March 1991.

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend will be aware that academic research shows that the tax regime of a country is more important for overseas investors than state handouts. Does not that prove that overseas investors have confidence in the continuation of the British tax regime under this Government and that they have greater confidence in the future of our economy than do Opposition Members?

Mr. Sainsbury: I absolutely agree. The tax regime is important in encouraging inward investment. Last year's inward investment decisions, of which about 350 are known to my Department, will either guarantee the security of, or create, 60,000 jobs in all regions of the United Kingdom. We would be foolish to put that amount of job creation at risk.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister agree that although we greatly welcome inward investment from Japan and America, it is still important that we retain our centres of innovation and of research and development? Are not they the real levers for determining the future security and direction of the British economy?

Mr. Sainsbury: Indeed, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that, perhaps as a result of the Government's encouragement of a tax regime for enterprise, industry's own funding of research and development grew by more than 50 per cent. in real terms between 1983 and 1989.

Mr. John Carlisle: My hon. Friend will be well aware of the large American investment in my constituency town of Luton by General Motors. At a time when the car manufacturing industry is very much on its knees, as evidenced by Ford's slashing prices, will he look sympathetically at any request from GM for any assistance that might be available either through funding in this country or through funding from the European Community?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend will recognise that although demand for cars in this country is down, the car industry is doing outstandingly well in exports. All parts of the industry deserve congratulations on that achievement.

Recession

4. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the recession in industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: Growth is set to resume in the second half of this year in response to lower inflation and an upturn in the world economy.

Mr. McAvoy: Is the Secretary of State aware that since the present Prime Minister took office more than 500,000 people have been made unemployed, manufacturing jobs have been disappearing at a rate of 4,000 a week and nearly 16,000 businesses have collapsed? When will the Government stop making pathetic excuses and implement the obvious package of reform measures required to take this country out of recession, to boost skills, increase investment and reduce unemployment? How many more manufacturing jobs is the Secretary of State prepared to see lost before he stands up for British industry?

Mr. Lilley: The Government are right to make the defeat of inflation their priority. We are succeeding in defeating inflation. It has fallen from almost 11 per cent. to 5·8 per cent. and it is heading to below 4 per cent. by the end of the year. Interest rates have come down too. That is the best way towards sustained non-inflationary growth. The Opposition have no policies and no strategy to deal with inflation, recession or unemployment.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although times have been difficult in the past few months and years, manufacturing industry in the north of England has combated those difficult times by becoming more aggressive and combative in export markets, and that there are now clear signs that we have reached the bottom of the recession and that confidence is being restored to businesses in the north? Does he agree that we shall see the interesting and, from my point of view as a northern Member, encouraging phenomenon of the end of the recession starting in the north of England and spreading to the south? Will he join me in condemning the Opposition who seem to glorify in wallowing in doom and gloom about industry throughout Britain?

Mr. Lilley: That was very much the message that I received during my recent visits to Teesside, Tyneside and county Durham. It is greatly to the credit of industry in the north of England, especially in the north-east, that it has diversified so much, has attracted inward investment and is exporting strongly. That is encouraging for the future. Like my hon. Friend, many of those industries say that they expect to come out of the recession ahead of the rest of the economy.

Mr. Beith: Why does the Secretary of State assume that a firm anti-inflation policy must be accompanied by rising unemployment? He should resist the blandishments of Labour and Conservative Members who believe in devaluation. He could maintain a strict interest rate policy and at the same time promote measures designed to ensure the repair of hospitals and schools, and the building of houses while there are so many people out of work.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken if he believes that one can fight inflation while prematurely relaxing fiscal policy.

Sir Hal Miller: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the performance of the motor industry which on the latest figures is exporting 49 per cent. of production with totally beneficial results for the balance of payments on manufactured goods, about which we hear so much from the Opposition? That trend is likely to improve further when American and Japanese investments come on stream.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes an important point about an exceedingly important industry which is doing very well. Its output in the past three months was up 6 per cent. on last year, and that has largely been achieved by an excellent record of substantially increasing exports.

Mr. Gordon Brown: With every major national and international report saying that every region and every sector of industry faces yet another summer of redundancies, closures and bankruptcies, will the Secretary of State tell the House how many more thousands of people will become unemployed, how many more businesses will go under and how much industrial capacity, skill and strength will be destroyed before the Government cut interest rates and improve investment and employment opportunities in all parts of the country?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman has played that recorded message endless times in the House. He has no positive policy to get out of a recession, to combat inflation or to solve unemployment. All the Opposition's policies would aggravate those problems. Increased public expenditure to the tune of £35 billion would aggravate inflation and a minimum wage would increase unemployment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Would not the surest way to prolong the recession be to relax the grip on inflation and allow prices and public spending to soar, which is what the Opposition advocate, thus making Britain chronically uncompetitive?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why industry and the CBI have endorsed our strategy. They recognise that we have our priorities right, and they and many forecasters are confident about growth in the second half of the year.

Banking

5. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the high street banks to discuss business bankruptcies and banking policy.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): The Chancellor of the Exchequer has met with the chairmen of the leading banks recently. The Treasury is conducting an inquiry into the relationships between banks and businesses and the Department of Trade and Industry has assisted by organising through each regional office a meeting between banks and business men passing on full information from those meetings to the Treasury. We await the Chancellor's conclusions.

Mr. McFall: In this David and Goliath struggle between small businesses and banks, what does the Secretary of State intend to do to redress the imbalance? How does he view the written contract proposal under which banks could not increase interest rates and charges without due notice? Businesses are collapsing at the rate of 1,000 a week. When, oh when, will the Government do something about small businesses?

Mr. Redwood: I have seen the Forum of Private Business proposals, to which I believe the hon. Gentleman is referring. They have been passed to the banks for comment, and will be one of the matters on which the Chancellor may touch when he produces his conclusions. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] The Chancellor will produce his conclusions as soon as he finishes his review. I am sure that hon. Members will want this to be a good review that takes into account all the evidence that the forum and others have passed to the Treasury. We all await the outcome of those findings with interest. The hon. Gentleman may also have noticed that the Forum of Private Business did not want to see the matter referred to the competition authorities because it thought that that would take too long.

Sir Robert McCrindle: Irrespective of the lack of sensitivity with which banks have sometimes been prone to deal with their small business customers, does my hon. Friend agree that so far there has been no evidence of a cartel among the banks? Would it not have been on that basis, and that basis alone, that the Government could have been asked to intervene?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right in that, for the competition authorities to intervene, there would have to be evidence of cartel collusion or anti-competitive practices. That is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading. He has not completed his review. He made a preliminary statement the other day, in which he said that at that date he did not have sufficient evidence to instigate an inquiry, but his preliminary inquiries are continuing. We have sent him other evidence and we await his findings, which will be made public in some form or other after the Chancellor has presented his conclusions.

Mrs. Mahon: Given that the Machine Tools Technologies Association recently told a group of Labour Members of Parliament that the industry could be wiped out in the next six or nine months, is not the Minister worried that industry has so little confidence in his Department? The association went further and said that it lacked confidence that the DTI could do anything to help small and medium-sized businesses, and that it was easier to get an audience with the Pope or Gorbachev than with a Minister in his Department. Does not that reflect a complete lack of confidence in what the Government have done for the past 12 years?

Mr. Redwood: Ministers in the DTI are ready and willing to meet business, and do so regularly. Many such meetings occur, day after day and week after week, with Ministers and officials in the Department because we are interested in and concerned about what the business community is saying, as we are its voice in Whitehall. As for the industry to which the hon. Lady refers, it has reported great success in exporting in recent months and in the past year. The DTI will do all that it can, with my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade in the lead, to promote its exports abroad and to work closely with it. I recommend that its representatives get in touch with the Minister for Trade if they are concerned mainly about exports and orders. The Government want to see banks supporting all good, viable businesses and I am sure that banks will listen to that message.

European Free Trade Association

6. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the progress of the talks between the members of the European Community and the European Free Trade Association.

Mr. Sainsbury: Good progress has been made towards the creation of a European economic area in the talks between the Community and the European Free Trade Association.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: By how much have British exports to the Community increased over the past 10 years? Can my hon. Friend give similar figures for our trade with EFTA?

Mr. Sainsbury: I shall write to my hon. Friend with the details, but he will be aware that our exports to the Community have grown substantially, as have our exports to EFTA. Even in a difficult world trading environment, with a recession in EFTA countries such as Sweden, our exports this year are well ahead of those for last year by volume.

Mr. Cohen: When will the Minister do something about the rotten COCOM agreement, which is contrary to free trade in Europe? Has he not had correspondence from me and OPT Optical Fibres in my constituency, which wants to export sub-standard fibres to the Soviet Union, but cannot because it is blocked by the agreement and the Government? That is affecting its business, and jobs are going to the wall. Has not the managing director written to the Minister to say that the DTI is letting down British industry in this respect? When will the Minister do something about this rotten agreement instead of living in the cold war?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman has, as on other occasions, introduced a subject that I find hard to relate to the negotiations between the EEC and EFTA. He will know that the COCOM arrangements are important for the security of our country. Therefore, I hope that he will have due regard to them.

Mr. Donald Thompson: When my hon. Friend conducts these talks, will he refer to the seemingly endless stream of Chinese textile goods coming through Denmark to be dumped in this country, sometimes as cheap as 17p a pair?

Mr. Sainsbury: The matter to which my hon. Friend refers is being considered, although it would not be directly affected by the negotiations which are the subject of the original question. However, bringing EFTA countries into a European economic area will improve trading opportunities for British industry throughout Europe.

West Midlands Manufacturing Output

7. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output in the west midlands.

Mr. Lilley: Manufacturing output in the west midlands, as elsewhere, will be helped by our policies of fostering a competitive environment, encouraging innovation, restoring incentives and, above all, defeating inflation.

Mr. Robinson: Is the Secretary of State aware that every answer that we have heard from him today on manufacturing industry shows him to be totally out of touch with the difficult and deteriorating circumstances under which it must operate? Is not he aware that he is embarked no longer on the defeat of inflation but on the annihilation of British industry? Since the Government came to power, we in the west midlands have lost 33 per cent. of our capacity and 32,000 jobs in manufacturing and, according to the CBI, 80 per cent. of the plants in the west midlands are working below capacity. In those circumstances, what does the right hon. Gentleman intend to do to dispel the clear impression of total incompetence and suspended inactivity on the part of his Department?

Mr. Lilley: That is a bit of a cheek from someone who has played his distinguished part in undermining British industry. The fact is that in the west midlands, which is heavily dependent on the motor car industry, the motor car industry has increased production. In the past few months Rover's production has risen by 4 per cent. and Land-Rover's by 8 per cent. They are exporting a record proportion of their output. I recently visited firms in the west midlands, one of which was exporting 95 per cent. and capturing the world market in its areas. The future for the west midlands, which is a great source of entrepreneurship in Britain, is rosy so long as we pursue the policies that the Government advocate and do not return to policies of nationalisation, intervention and high taxation which the hon. Gentleman advocates.

Mr. Roger King: My right hon. Friend is well known for his open mind in discussing and considering future aspects of policy. Has he heard one single policy from the Opposition which he thinks would help west midlands industry boost its productive capacity?

Mr. Lilley: I must say, having considered the matter with an open mind, that I have not heard a single proposal that is in any way constructive. Indeed, to hide their intellectual vacuum, the Opposition simply retail bad news with relish.

Mr. Henderson: With car sales down 25 per cent., truck sales down 40 per cent. and bus sales down 40 per cent., I do not know who the Secretary of State has been talking to when he visits the west midlands and the car industry. Does not he agree with Mr. Colin Hope, the president of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, that the British motor car industry has been seriously damaged by the recession and that it cannot operate sensibly in the boom or bust environment created by the Government?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman exemplifies exactly what I was referring to. He takes an industry which has increased its output and investment and tries to find statistics suggesting its decline. Longbridge in the west midlands has the most advanced manufacturing assembly line in the motor car industry in the world and the highest efficiency in Europe, yet he has nothing but ill to say of it.

Funeral Services

8. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports on funeral services he has commissioned or received in the course of the last year.

Mr. Leigh: I have commissioned no such reports. The Director General of Fair Trading published a report on funeral services in January 1989.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that although there is some public concern about the pricing of funerals, there is much greater public concern about the threat to their provision in some Labour areas, such as Liverpool, where politically motivated men see the services of crematoria and cemeteries as fit for their political

activities? Is it not high time that my hon. Friend talked to his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment about ways of protecting people at what is, inevitably, a sad time, but which can become a harrowing time as a result of the withdrawal of those services by people who should be providing them for the public?

Mr. Leigh: Suffice it to say that it is sad that a political climate where such threats can be made should be able to grow up anywhere. Funerals are an intensely personal and sad business for families; I shall therefore forbear to say any more, and will let the public be the judge.

Mr. Foulkes: What is the Minister doing to encourage all funeral directors to join the National Association of Funeral Directors and to accept the association's code of practice, as do all Co-operative societies throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Leigh: The association has issued a code of practice, in co-operation with the Director General of Fair Trading. That code of practice is now a year old.

I have given the matter considerable thought. Although the code requires funeral directors to publish the basic costs of funerals, I feel that it would help the public if the association insisted on itemising those costs. Families are in a uniquely vulnerable position at such times, and I shall approach the association on that ground.

Inflation

9. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement about the impact of inflation on the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: Inflation erodes competitiveness and destroys output and jobs.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that succinct reply. Will he also pay tribute, however, to ICI plc for having invested in research and development at a much higher level than the rate of inflation? Should not the company be warmly congratulated on that?

Hostile approaches to the company might well affect its magnificent performance for many years. It employs some 54,000 people and makes a major contribution to our economy. Surely it should be seen as a national asset and its operations should be recognised as being in the national interest.

Mr. Sainsbury: I know that my hon. Friend will agree that inflation is one of the most damaging influences on our research and development spending. The increased spending that I mentioned earlier is clearly a response not only to a lower tax regime, but to a lower inflation regime. A return to the taxation and inflation levels that characterised the last Labour Government would have a disastrous effect on British industry's research and development.

Mr. Harry Ewing: If the Minister is so convinced that inflation damages the competitiveness of British industry, why on earth did the Government allow it to increase in the first place?

Mr. Sainsbury: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman doubts whether inflation is damaging. If so, I am very surprised. If, however, he agrees with me that it is damaging, why does he support the policies of nationalisation, high spending, high taxation and high borrowing that are espoused by his party? They would make the present position much worse.

Mr. Michael Brown: May I hark back to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)? Will my hon. Friend also note that, although inflation over the past three or four years has been higher than we would have wished, SCM Chemicals in my constituency has been extremely competitive? Moreover, it is owned by the Hanson group of companies.

Mr. Sainsbury: I know that my hon. Friend strongly supports all industry in his constituency. My Department certainly welcomes good news from industry—which we do not hear very often from the doom and gloom experts in the Labour party.

Regional Policy

10. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the European Commission to discuss regional policy.

Mr. Leigh: On 25 April.

Mr. Brown: Obviously, I am not a fan of the European Commission. Will the Minister tell us, however, when RECHAR funds will be used to help Britain's mining communities? Will those funds provide direct and immediate relief, and will they be separate from any additional grants that may be available from either the EEC or the United Kingdom Government?

Mr. Leigh: I assure the hon. Gentleman that additionality will apply. What that means, in plain English, is that the funds that we receive make a real difference—that public spending is higher than it would otherwise be.

It is true that Commissioner Millan wants more transparency in the arrangements. On 25 April, we held a very helpful and constructive dialogue with him. Our officials are proceding on the basis of those discussions, and we hope to reach a final agreement soon.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Has my hon. Friend noted that all the contributor nations to the European Community budget have said that they would not fund more substantial structural, and therefore regional, funds to other countries in the Community that might need them if there were too rapid a move to a single currency? Although we would not eliminate the possibility that in the long term a single currency might arise, does my hon. Friend agree that that would mean that any party in Britain that advocated increased structural funds would effectively be making an extra expenditure commitment? Therefore, is that not what the Labour party is doing?

Mr. Leigh: My hon., Friend is tempting me into dangerous territory for a junior Minister when he talks of European monetary union and so on. Being a junior Minister is a little like being a lower order batsman—the wicket is a bit difficult so perhaps I should put a dead ball on this one. However, I cannot resist saying that we give £1,800 million a year in structural funds, we receive about £900 million back in grant and we receive £600 million a year rebate under Fontainebleau. Therefore, on a Europewide basis, we give to the structural funds some

£300 million a year. When Opposition Members talk in facile terms about moving quickly to a single currency, they should bear it in mind that we already give £300 million a year and that an immediate single currency would result in a substantial increase in what we contribute to structural funds.

Mr. Pike: When the Minister meets representatives in Europe, how does he explain the fact that the Government have so neglected the manufacturing regions of Britain over the past 12 years that investment, jobs and output in the north-west are, in constant terms, 30 per cent. lower than in 1979?

Mr. Leigh: I do not know by what extraordinary statistical device the hon. Gentleman reached that result. Over the three-year public expenditure survey round the Government are giving £567 million in regional selective assistance, for which I am responsible. To argue that the Government do not care about the regions when they are giving that much money—probably as much as they would be allowed to give by the Commission—is absurd. The Opposition have to answer the question whether their regional policies would be allowed by the Commission. They would not. Investment, output and productivity are all considerably higher than in 1979.

Mergers

11. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what attention he pays to the degree of state control when deciding whether to refer mergers to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Lilley: I restated the Government's policy towards mergers, as I said earlier, on 12 June.

Sir Michael Neubert: Does my right hon. Friend accept my assurance that, in paying close attention to the degree of state ownership or state control of foreign companies or others making takeover bids, he is seen as exercising entirely proper concern for fair competition and the need to avoid nationalisation by the back door? Will he accept that the British people have no more liking for imported socialism than they have for the home-grown variety?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend puts it very well. Our privatisation programme has proved the superiority of competitive private enterprise over state monopoly ownership. That is why we encourage the private sector and are against the extension of the state sector, whether it be from home or abroad.

Mr. Salmond: Given the recent announcement, is the Secretary of State prepared to reconsider the case for the referral of British Steel's activities to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Has he discussed such a possibility with the Secretary of State for Scotland? Given that and so many other important questions that need to be asked about the Secretary of State for Scotland's role in the steel industry closures in Scotland, is not it disgraceful that that right hon. Gentleman will not be attending the debate tomorrow because he is too fully occupied having strawberries and cream at Holyrood Palace?

Mr. Lilley: That was a typically pathetic riposte at the end of the hon. Gentleman's question. The hon. Gentleman would debilitate Scottish industry if he got the chance by subjecting it largely to state ownership. The gist of this question is that we should be protected from state ownership where we can. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman thinks that state ownership is the answer to all his problems.

I make the decision about referrals to the MMC after taking advice from the Director General of Fair Trading. On the general well-being of British industry, when it refers to Scotland, I discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and we deal with those matters together.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. Friend remind the House at what level such mergers must be referred to the European Community? Does not the low level that has been set show how much sovereignty has passed from the House to the continent?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite correct. We faced a dilemma. Under the treaty of Rome, the Community could intervene after we made monopoly and merger decisions. We therefore faced double jeopardy. We think that it is better for mergers of 5 becu or more to be handled by the Community and for those below that figure to be handled by national Governments. Logically, there is no need for Community interference, as a Europewide monopoly would be a monopoly in at least one member state. As we started from the position written into the treaty of Rome, the present arrangements are very much better than the double jeopardy arrangements and are a satisfactory second best.

Local Businesses

12. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what schemes his Department has sponsored in the Truro and St. Austell area to aid local business.

Mr. Leigh: Business in the Truro and St. Austell area can benefit from a wide range of Department of Trade and Industry schemes.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister will know that I have frequently pressed for the reintroduction of assisted area status for Truro and St. Austell. Many jobs are being lost at both ends of the constituency because of the economic mess that the Government have got themselves into. They have repeatedly said that they will review the boundaries only after a general election. Given that economic mess, and as the Government have postponed the election, may we at least proceed with the review to offer some hope to local businesses?

Mr. Leigh: Most objective observers recognise that it would be unwise to tamper with the assisted area map before the general election. Some areas could be included on the map and some could be removed from it, and perhaps the St. Austell area should be included. However, it would be unwise to make boundary changes before the general election.

I recently visited the Indian Queens estate, which is close to St. Austell and is in an assisted area. Businesses on the estate are eligible for regional selective assistance and regional enterprise grants, and a raft of other Department of Trade and Industry schemes are available to the hon. Member's constituents. As the hon. Gentleman knows well from our correspondence on the point, I am discussing with the Department of the Environment

derelict land grant which would be of considerable benefit to his constituency. I assure him that I am doing everything in my power to help his constituents.

Mr. Knapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that that typical supplementary question shows why Truro urgently needs a Conservative Member of Parliament? Is not it time that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) realised that free trade and level playing fields are the way to bring prosperity to Truro, St. Austell and everywhere else?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is quite right. Cornwall has led the world in free enterprise. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) is out of tune with his constituents, and I have no doubt that his Conservative opponent, Nick St. Aubyn, who is an excellent man, will be elected at the next election.

Inward Investment

13. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Britain's recent record in attracting inward investment from the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Leigh: According to figures just published by the German economics Ministry in Bonn, direct investment in the United Kingdom by German companies in 1990 amounted to £1·9 billion.

Mr. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that that welcome figure is further proof of the enormous attractiveness of the United Kingdom's business climate, which has been achieved as a result of Government policies? Is that a one-off figure or does it represent a growing trend of inward investment from the Federal Republic? Does he agree that that figure and the performance of this part of the economy would be ruined by the destructive policies of the Labour party?

Mr. Leigh: Figures compiled since 1952 show that German companies have invested some £7·6 billion in this country. Remarkably, half that investment has been made in the past three years. In 1990, we received no less than 18·6 per cent. of all German foreign investment. If the doom and gloom merchants on the Opposition Benches are so right in saying that the economy is in a mess, why are we the No. 1 location for inward investment in the world and the favoured nation for German investors?

Mr. Battle: Is it not clear that German investment in Britain merely reflects a worldwide pattern and that similar trends can be seen in America and Japan? Is not the Government's record of creating stable industrial relations and low taxation over the past 11 years the essential ingredient in ensuring that that pattern continues?

Mr. Leigh: Yes, we are indeed the preferred location for inward investors from Japan and America, and that is a two-way process. Although about £7·8 billion has been invested in this country, we have invested £16·6 billion abroad, which shows the strength of our manufacturing base.

Mr. Skinner: Is there not another side to the issue? In the past three or four months West Germany has run into balance of payments difficulties because of its takeover of East Germany. Under the system of economic and monetary union of which we are now a part because of the Common Market, shall we not end up using British taxpayers' money to bail out the East German mess that the West Germans have taken over?

Mr. Leigh: I cannot speak for the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, but I have no intention of doing that. I am sorry to disappoint him, but investment from Germany is running at a very good level. That may be disappointing news for the hon. Gentleman, but it is the truth.

Mr. Farrell: Could I take up the point made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) whom I just failed to beat in the 1979 election? I remind my hon. Friend that in the 1975 manifesto issued by the pro-marketeers, those voting yes were assured that the threat of a movement of the Common Market towards an economic and monetary union had been removed and that that threat, according to the manifesto, would have restricted industrial growth and would have affected jobs. Is not it now clear that fixed exchange rates do exactly that, and it is as true now as it was in 1975?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend knows my views on these matters. I have full confidence in the ability of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister to negotiate successfully.

Tendering

14. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has made representations recently to any other EC Governments concerning tendering for supplies to the public service of such Governments.

Mr. Redwood: The Government are very keen to see compliance with all European directives by all member states. I have not made any representations recently, but the Department of Trade and Industry has a compliance unit which is very willing to help individuals and companies with compliance problems in any of the 12 member states. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific query, we shall of course take it up for him.

Mr. Trimble: May I draw the Minister's attention to the Irish Republic's Local Authorities (Combined Purchasing) Act 1939 under which the Government of the Irish Republic can insist that all goods supplied to the public service must be manufactured in Ireland and to the notes for tenderers which require the country of origin to be correctly described and even insist that Northern Ireland must not be described as Ireland? Does he agree that that gives suppliers in the Irish Republic an unfair advantage? Would not an appropriate temporary counter measure be to exclude it from tendering for public service contracts in the United Kingdom until it complies?

Mr. Redwood: Such a course of action would not be right and it would be illegal under the directive that sets out the clear obligations of this country and of all the other member states. If the hon. Gentleman believes that there are cases of discrimination in the Republic of Ireland against good offers by companies from other member states he should bring them to the Government's attention and we shall make any necessary representations on behalf of his constituents or of the companies involved.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend know that British Reinforced Concrete in my constituency was closed down

last week because of a massive acquisition of its market share by a German company which also contributed to the closure of and loss of jobs in the Rugby Portland Cement subsidiary? Does he also know that there was a massive £75 million contract available to put security fencing around a Ministry of Defence establishment in Germany and that the Property Services Agency suggested that the British company came to see me because it was quite clear that there was no point in its attempting to get that contract because it had been going to a German company from the beginning? Will he examine that matter, and will the Government please do something to help British industry in that respect?

Mr. Redwood: Of course I will look into that matter for my hon. Friend. If it is a contract governed by either the works or the supplies directive, the German authorities must comply with it. The Council of Ministers recently agreed compliance directives to enforce the works and supplies directives because of the concerns of my hon. Friend and others. The Government are determined that if it is fair that it is opened up here, it is fair that it is opened up there as well. That is why we have a compliance unit and that is why we will willingly take up any case about which hon. Members have good evidence to help us.

Manufacturing Industry

15. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet his European counterparts in the EC Industry Council to discuss support for manufacturing industry.

Mr. Redwood: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Technology will be attending the meeting of the Industry Council on 18 November. The agenda for this meeting has not yet been fixed.

Mr. McMaster: Will the Minister explain to his European counterparts why, at this time of huge trade deficit, the Government provide less support to British exporters, especially in terms of export credits, than many other European countries provide for their exporters? Is he prepared to sit back, to watch that happening and to let our trading position get worse and worse, or will he do something to help British exporters?

Mr. Redwood: As the hon. Gentleman should know, Britain's trade position has been improving over the past year. Exports have been rising and have been at record levels in many sectors in recent months. That is welcome. There is a comprehensive series of services to exporters from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Export Credits Guarantee Department. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade is active in promoting the interests of all our exporters.

Mr. Forman: In all future meetings with his EC counterparts, will my hon. Friend the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State take steps to ensure that the things that deserve protection in Britain are protected? I am thinking of the valiant stance that has already been taken to safeguard the mile, the acre and the pint.

Mr. Redwood: Willingly I pledge that. I assure the House that Ministers in the DTI are extremely keen to stand up for British interests in the EC and we do so regularly.

Dr. Moonie: One subject that does not appear to have exercised the Minister's mind in his discussions with his European counterparts is the Scottish steel industry. Given that he has had the report of the Select Committee for several months, given that he has done nothing in that time and given his refusal to meet hon. Members whose constituencies are affected by the closures, will he tell the House how many lost jobs in the steel industry in Scotland are acceptable to him? What does the "Department of Enterprise" intend to do about it?

Mr. Redwood: I do not like the loss of any jobs, but I want a competitive and vigorous industry, run by people who know what they are doing—the managers and directors of that business. There will be an opportunity to discuss that issue in the House later this week when I am sure that hon. Members will be able to put their points more clearly.

Mr. Tim Smith: When my hon. Friend meets his counterparts in the Industry Council, will he make it clear that the support that the French Government have given to their nationalised industries is totally unacceptable? Is not it time that we had an EC directive on privatisation, requiring countries to denationalise companies that have no place in the public sector?

Mr. Redwood: That is a delightful idea, but there might be a few difficulties in negotiating it with some of our partners. As to subsidies and state involvement in nationalised industries, and the pursuit of anti-competitive practices, of course the Government regularly take up those matters with the Commission. There is an active Commissioner in Brussels who is exercised about those concerns. Indeed, recent cases have raised the issue of French intervention and subsidy for industry. The French Government are finding that some of their practices are not legal under the treaty and are being asked to roll them back.

Telecommunications

16. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate has been made of the United Kingdom's share of the European and world telecommunications markets and of the prospects until the end of the decade.

Mr. Lilley: In 1989, the United Kingdom's share of the western European and world markets for telecommunications equipment was approximately 13 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively. No specific projections are available for the rest of the decade, but United Kingdom exports have more than doubled over the past five years. That trend should continue.

Mr. Hain: I am not surprised that the Secretary of State is unable to give any forecasts, because he has effectively given a blank cheque to American-dominated cable television companies to compete on the local loop of the telecommunications network, while denying British Telecom and other United Kingdom telecommunications operators equivalent access to the American network.

Why is he not insisting on reciprocity, or is he willing to perpetuate that discrimination and allow Britain to fall from the first to the second division of the world telecommunications market?

Mr. Lilley: I have pressed the American authorities vigorously for complete liberalisation, to allow our companies to bring their skills and expertise to the benefit of the American telecommunications network. Meanwhile, I am not prepared to cut off our nose to spite our face by shutting the door on investment from overseas.

The hon. Member may be referring to today's announcement by Sir Bryan Carsberg, which I fully support, that he seeks to ensure that new providers of local telephone services will not be impeded by the access deficit contribution, and that the terms of British Telecom's licence will be changed to enable new companies to come in and provide local services—with the extra competition, newer services and lower prices which that has always meant. We entirely reject the Labour party's policy of renationalisation.

Mr. Wells: After that welcome announcement, can my right hon. Friend tell me how an increase in competition will result from what the Director General of Oftel has told us today?

Mr. Lilley: Yes. Sir Bryan has said that he will seek a change in BT's licences so that he will have the right to waive the contribution that might otherwise be required from companies competing in the introduction of new telephone services, such as local calls, cable television services, PCN—personal communication network—services, and other mobile services. That will enable companies to build up in the early stages without the adverse effect that the charge might have had. When companies are fully established they will have to pay the charge and the contribution to the existing BT network. This will be widely welcomed by all those who value competition, who want to see choice and who welcome lower prices.

Footwear and Textiles

18. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on Government assistance to the footwear and textile industries.

Mr. Sainsbury: Companies in the footwear and textile industries are eligible for, and have received, assistance under a range of Government schemes.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Minister realise that his answer will give no comfort to those who run our textile and footwear industries, or to those who work in them? Is he aware of the huge job losses that have occurred in those two industries in the past six months, and that cities such as Leicester—and, indeed, the rest of the east midlands—have been badly hit by the recession? Is the Minister aware that many of those job losses are directly due to Government policies—high interest rates, and Government failure to provide the same kind of assistance as is provided by other Governments to their textile and footwear industries? When will the hon. Gentleman get off his hands and start doing something legitimate to protect the interests of those two vital British industries?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am aware of the job losses to which the hon. Gentleman refers and those are, of course, always a matter for regret. The textile industry, like other industries, has been suffering from recession, but the hon. Gentleman will also be aware that some job losses are attributable to investment in the industry, which is increasing the productivity and competitiveness of the industry and, indeed, has contributed to a successful export record. Exports of textiles and clothing increased by 12 per cent. to £4·6 billion worth in 1990. The industry deserves congratulation on that performance.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) will take that hat off I shall call him.

Mr. John Browne: Does my hon. Friend accept that the best assistance that he could give to the footwear and textile industry would be to ensure that customers, especially big notorious late paying customers, pay their bills on time? Rather than castigating the banks for not piling up more imprudent debt for British industry, would he not be better advised to call on companies to pay their bills to the footwear and textile industries more promptly?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that all purchasers in British industry, whether large or small, follow good practice and pay their suppliers at least in accordance with the contract conditions.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister tell us what representations he is making to the European Community to ensure that unfair subsidies such as those given to the textile industry in the Prato region of Italy are brought to an end? The problem has lasted for several years. The Government and the EC seem unwilling to tackle those unfair subsidies in other EC countries. The British textile industry is prepared to compete with any country on equal terms, but that is simply not happening. The situation is extremely unfair and is leading directly to job losses in cities such as Bradford, which I represent, where 14,000 jobs are still directly dependent on the textile industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: I share the hon. Gentleman's view that the British textile industry is well able to compete on that celebrated level playing field. We energetically pursue any allegations of unfair trading practices through the European Community and we are happy to listen to and follow up any submissions from the industry on those grounds. We also hope that, as a result of a successful outcome of the Uruguay round, there will be stricter rules and disciplines in which the textile industry and, indeed, all industries will have to operate.

Product Safety

22. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussion he has had with the National Consumer Council about product safety.

Mr. Leigh: I have met the National Consumer Council and its representatives on several occasions to discuss a wide range of consumer affairs, but product safety has not been raised.

Mr. Flynn: Is not it curious that some products that are meant to improve health destroy the health of thousands

of people? Will the Minister convey to the industry our concern at the deaths that occur every year—not only suicides but many accidental deaths among people who take drugs—especially paracetamol—that are inadequately labelled? The labels are often misleading and in microscopic print. Is that a matter which the Minister could take up, in the interests of saving many lives?

Mr. Leigh: I know of the hon. Gentleman's concern. He did not say, however, that it is an offence to supply unsafe goods and that, after 1992, all members states will be required to apply high standards of safety. I am prepared to discuss the matter with consumer groups and I should add that we fund consumer groups to the tune of about £19 million a year and take their representations very seriously.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. I will take it later, after the statements.

Mr. Winterton: I cannot do it after the statements.

Mr. Speaker: That is bad luck, I am afraid.

Mr. Winterton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman sit down? He is a senior member of the Chairmen's Panel and he knows as well as any hon. Member that points of order are taken after statements. I ask him not to persist.

Mr. Winterton: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There can be nothing further to it.

Mr. Winterton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman please to resume his seat.

Northern Ireland (Talks)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): The political talks which have been taking place at Parliament buildings, Stormont have been brought to a conclusion. I should like to take this opportunity to explain to the House the background to that decision, to describe what has been achieved during the talks and to set out the Government's hopes for the future.

Hon. Members will recall that my statement to the House on 26 March was accepted as a basis for political talks which would address, as part of the same process, relationships within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; relationships among the people of the island of Ireland; and relationships between the two Governments. I announced that talks would take place in three strands corresponding to those three main sets of relationships. To allow an opportunity for the wider political dialogue which the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland and the two Governments envisaged, the two Governments had agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference between two pre-specified dates, subsequently confirmed as being 26 April and 16 July. This interval, allowing some time at each end for the Anglo-Irish secretariat to complete the business of servicing one conference meeting and to make preparations to service the next, provided 10 clear weeks for substantive political exchanges. The talks began on 30 April.

It became clear that it would not be possible to launch the other strands of the talks and thus to complete the process as a whole before the end of that interval, and that that was beginning to inhibit our ability to make further substantive progress. After consultation with the leaders of the political parties, I concluded that the talks should therefore be brought to an end. I have also been in touch with the Irish Government to recount my conclusion.

I should now like to take stock of what has been achieved during the talks and of the further prospects for securing constructive political development in relation to Northern Ireland. As the House knows, it did not prove possible to move as rapidly as we had hoped to plenary sessions of the first strand of the talks. A range of new procedural issues had to be resolved. A series of bilateral exchanges succeeded in determining the venues for meetings in the second strand of the talks, arrangements for chairing that strand of discussion, the identity of the chairman and the procedural guidelines which would be observed.

Plenary sessions started on 17 June. After my opening statement, the parties presented their initial position papers, after which the papers were discussed, examined and clarified. Subsequently, during a more intensive schedule of meetings, there was a debate on themes that had emerged from the initial presentations.

The commitment and seriousness of purpose shown by all the parties in these talks is a source of encouragement for the future. The plenary sessions provided the forum for some significant and constructive exchanges among the parties and with Her Majesty's Government on a range of fundamental issues. The nature of those exchanges served to confirm the judgment involved in initiating the talks process that the time is ripe for political talks in relation to Northern Ireland that address all the relevant relationships; that the process is of value and has potentially even greater value; that a degree of common ground exists; and that there is a good prospect that a comprehensive political accommodation can be reached. I would like to express my appreciation of the commitment shown by all the participants.

To those who would say, "I told you so—it would never work," I offer the reality of the past few weeks. While I am naturally disappointed at this moment that the current process has to end, foundations have been laid for progress in the future which neither cynics nor the men of violence will be able to undermine.

For myself, I hope that it will prove possible in due course to have further exchanges with the parties, and with the Irish Government, to explore, initially on a bilateral basis, whether we can establish terms on which fresh discussions could be held.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): The whole House will have listened with regret to the statement that the Secretary of State felt that he had to make today. That regret will also be felt by the peoples of these islands and more particularly by the people in Northern Ireland. The only people who will get any sort of consolation from the Secretary of State's statement will be the paramilitaries and, as the Secretary said, the cynics.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for the great determination of purpose that he has shown in keeping the talks going in the face of what at times appeared to be insurmountable obstacles. I pay tribute also to the other participants in the talks who were prepared to re-examine cherished positions in order to get the talks going.

At this point the Secretary of State clearly feels that there is little prospect of further progress. Nevertheless, his statement errs on the side of optimism and offers some encouragement for the future. We in the Labour party endorse the Secretary of State's last paragraph.

Despite the optimistic note, the Secretary of State must feel intensely disappointed that, yet again, an opportunity has been lost to secure an internal political settlement in the Province that is acceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland and to the British and Irish Governments. I make it clear on behalf of the Labour party that we have supported and will continue to support the three-strand approach to the talks whatever refinements may have to be made to that. Our view is that this represents the best possible avenue for a lasting and peaceful political settlement within the Province. There is an increasing desire and hope among the people of Northern Ireland, not least among many of those to whom I spoke this morning who were saddened by the fact that I was leaving Ireland to come here to hear the statement, that in the not-too-distant future the Northern Ireland politicians will again feel sufficiently confident and able to reach a settlement.

There are a number of specific questions that I should like to ask the Secretary of State. First, will Sir Ninian Stephen, who manfully agreed to chair the second strand, now be stood down or will he be put on hold for a period of time? Secondly, will the Secretary of State give the House an indication of the positive achievements to come out of the talks so far?

Thirdly, what change in circumstances will lead the right hon. Gentleman to reconvene the talks? Fourthly, will he assure the House that the two Governments will

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

maintain the highest possible co-operation in security and other areas in which the two parts of the island of Ireland have a mutual interest and common approach, and that the Anglo-Irish Agreement must still remain the basis of the relationship between the two parts of Ireland, this island and the island of Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks and for his remarks about myself and about those colleagues from other parties who participated in the talks and who, as I said when we concluded the talks at Stormont this morning, showed great courage in coming to the talks. The hon. Gentleman referred to the paramilitaries. Throughout the talks, the commitment of all those taking part to carrying forward the talks was noticeable, despite the actions of the paramilitaries.

Although I understand why the hon. Gentleman refers to an opportunity lost, in the time that we eventually had it would not have been possible to do the job with the thoroughness with which everyone would wish to see it done. As I have said, I hope that foundations have been laid for the future.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the three strands. The concept of conducting the talks in three strands has been wholly sustained by the frequency with which, even in the first strand of talks, colleagues wished to raise matters that belonged in the other two.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific questions, Sir Ninian Stephen has, of course, been informed of the course of events. There is no immediate role for him to play in the circumstances that have developed. However, if we were able to make use of his services in the future at some stage, I hope that he would be as willing then to undertake them as he has been so far.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the achievements of the talks. I have no hesitation in saying that, although exchanges were robust at times, there were also moments when the participants received encouragement from each other's contributions and the manner in which they were made. That was a positive development in terms of looking forward. I do not regard it as appropriate to go into the detail of what was said, not least because it is important to leave the field clear in the hope that these matters might be picked up again in the future. However, I am sure that all the participants would agree that they found good things to take away from some of the discussions.

On the question about reconvening the talks, I have said that I hope that it might be possible for fresh talks to take place, but whether they do so will be a matter for the parties themselves. Of course, I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about security co-operation.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Is the Secretary of State aware that even in the last few critical days he has retained the confidence and respect of all who participated in the talks? Does he agree that his efforts have greatly enlarged the capacity of the party leaders in Northern Ireland to get together, as they have many times in the past to deal especially with economic and social issues, and that they have got together and co-operated in a way that could not be matched by other party leaders in the House?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks and accept them on behalf of my hon. Friend the Minister of State who also took part in chairing the meetings. I am also grateful for what the right hon. Gentleman said about enlarging the capacity of the parties and the party leaders in Northern Ireland to get together and agree that our mutual and collective experience has enlarged that possibility.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): As the right hon. Gentleman has made it clear that, in his opinion, the talks have been helpful and a degree of progress has been made, and as he has implied that if they had continued a greater degree of progress could probably have been made, will he now tell the people of Northern Ireland why, when we were making that progress, the date of 16 July suddenly became sacrosanct?

Also, why was the right hon. Gentleman not prepared to give us injury time? In any other game injury time would have been given. If he is suggesting that he can hold successful talks again by trying to suck the Unionist leaders into compliance with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, or build on a foundation that can be sabotaged, as the foundation of these talks was sabotaged by Dublin, the Unionist leaders can have no part in that.

Mr. Brooke: I understand the emotion that underlies the hon. Gentleman's question, but it would be wrong to say that 16 July was suddenly injected into the process as a firm date. The two Governments agreed earlier this year that, to enable the talks to take place, the conference would not meet between two pre-specified dates. Those dates were subsequently specified as 26 April and 16 July, leaving a clear 10 weeks for the talks. The two Governments' commitment to hold a conference on 16 July has been in the public domain since the last conference on 26 April. Therefore, the conference on 16 July is very much part of the agreed framework for the talks, which was settled before the 10-week period began and was clearly stated in my statement of 26 March.

As for what the hon. Gentleman said about injury time —I understand the nature of that question—I do not think that any of us, in the long period in which we were constructing the statement of 26 March, could have identified all the contingencies that could conceivably have arisen during that period. The hon. Gentleman implied that I was seeking to suck the Unionist leaders into a predicament. He knows, from all the contacts that we have had in the past two years, that I respect the Unionist leaders far too much to imagine that they would be misled in any way by me or would do anything other than what was governed by the principles of their party and the Province.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): May I, too, express my deep appreciation of the Secretary of State, the Minister of State and their staff for the intense efforts that they have put into these talks. The Social Democratic and Labour party very much regret that the talks have come to an end, but we recognised the inevitability of that once it became clear that certain parties could not proceed in the talks after 9 July. Once that date was set, it was obvious that the process could not be completed and that strand 2, involving the Irish Government, could not even begin. We also regret that the other parties could not accept our proposition for breaking that deadlock, which was that once we accepted one gap in Anglo-Irish Conferences between 25 April and 16 July, we should have another betweeen 16 July and some date in September or October

to allow us to continue. I see no change in principle in that. Regrettably, for their own reasons, the other parties could not accept that proposal.

We welcome the exchanges that took place. Many of them were very valuable and differed greatly from exchanges that have taken place in the past. We hope that they can be built on in the future. However, the whole experience has underlined our consistent view that such talks should take place without preconditions of any description because, ultimately, preconditions hang people on hooks.

In the meantime, as the talks have broken down, we must face certain realities. The absence of agreement emphasises the need for both Governments to intensify their co-operation so that there are no vacuums. We wish to express our appreciation to both Governments for all the steps that they have taken to make the talks possible and we hope that they will continue to work together in the same spirit.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon Gentleman for his remarks about me and about my hon. Friend the Minister of State. In exactly the same way as the two Governments have held to the rules set out in the statement of 26 March, it is also wholly appropriate that any other participant in the talks should honour and subscribe to those rules. If we are to regard those rules as sacrosanct in the process—it is good that they should be—I wholly understand why any party would want to be governed by them.

During the time when we have been engaged in the talks, all who have taken part agree that it has been a sufficiently supple process to enable us to make the progress that we have. I cannot prejudge what people would say if we explored the idea of resuming talks hereafter.

The hon. Gentleman referred to conducting talks without preconditions. The greater the flexibility, the better—but we shall have to deal with that issue when we come to talk to the parties.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his patient and worthy efforts have been much appreciated in all parts of the House? Does he agree that for the immediate future it is best to avoid recrimination and to keep his door open to any possibility of building on this undoubted achievement? Last but not least, will he confirm that the status quo continues and that that status quo includes the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the talks. I wholly agree that the most likely basis for progress will lie in avoiding recrimination and rancour at this stage. My door will be open; and my hon. Friend was correct about the status quo.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It must be rare for a Minister of the Crown to come to the Dispatch Box and report a relative failure—at any rate, a relative lack of positive progress—and yet be met with such universal sympathy, because we all recognise his considerable efforts in these endeavours over the past few months. The leader of the Alliance party in the Province told me this afternoon that the talks had had some of the positive and encouraging features that the right hon. Gentleman has outlined to the House.

As one who watched the proceedings from this side of the Irish sea, may I tell the right hon. Gentleman that the people of Northern Ireland must feel a deep sense of frustration? But they will have the same opportunity as the rest of us some time during the next 12 months to elect representatives to Westminster, and in so doing they will be well advised to look to those who put the urgent quest for peace and prosperity in the Province above the time-wasting and procedural trivia pursued by some.

Mr. Brooke: I very much appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman said about the manner in which the talks were conducted and I thank him for the sympathy that he offered. All who have participated in the talks have been struck and impressed by the interest in them and by the good will shown by people in the Province towards the talks.

It would not surprise me if, after this conclusion to the process, there was continuing pressure from the people of Northern Ireland to see that the talks are carried forward. But it would be quite wrong to suggest that the politicians of Northern Ireland have failed the Province thus far. We have been somewhat frustrated by circumstances, but I regard the fact that everyone is encouraged by the progress that we have made as a good omen.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): May I urge the Ulster people to look to the future with optimism and not to dwell on the past? I agree with the Secretary of State that the talks provide a reasonable basis for future progress in Northern Ireland. Will he, as one who has shown great perseverance, continue with his efforts to bring about a political rapprochement in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: I am particularly touched by the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He was present when I made my speech in Bangor on 9 January last year. I know that he feels that I have perhaps not kept him quite as fully informed in the ensuing 18 months as I should have done. I am touched by what the hon. Gentleman said and I totally concur with his optimism.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State, as ever, has persevered and I join in the congratulations. The bald fact is that the talks have concluded and, to use the expression of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), they have broken down. To aid those of us watching from this side of the water, will the Secretary of State tell us about the stumbling blocks that he will have to overcome before there can be fresh talks, rather than a continuation of talks?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the way in which he phrased his question, because it enables me to clarify a matter.

I do not think that anybody who engaged in the talks would say that they had broken down. The talks were constructed to take place within a specific time. However, we spent much time on procedural matters relating to strands beyond the first one and that left us with inadequate time to address the matter of substance. The talks ended because we ran out of time, rather than because of frustration amongst the parties.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): Is it not significant that each of the party leaders involved in the talks has today praised the role of the Secretary of State in helping to make them possible and in measuring their

[Sir David Mitchell]

achievements? Has the way in which the talks ended left it possible for a further initiative to be taken later this year to see whether further progress can be made?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that what I said earlier makes it clear that any praise about the conduct of the talks applies to all those who participated. My hon. Friend asked whether fresh talks would be possible. It is sensible to wait a few weeks before taking any steps in that direction, but, of course, I shall listen closely for any rustling in the undergrowth.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that there is a statement on Yugoslavia after this one, and there is considerable pressure on the two debates that will follow. I shall take two more questions from each side. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Order. I have to balance the time that I can allow for this statement against other business of the House. *[Interruption.]* Order. I hope that Ulster Members will understand when I say that, as I have called the leaders of the Northern Ireland parties, I propose to give an opportunity to other Members of the Parliament of the United Kingdom to ask questions.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that the good will expressed to him personally does not alter the fact that his announcement is another setback in a long series of attempts to bring peace to Ireland? There has been partition, Stormont, direct rule, power sharing, internment without trial, strip searching, plastic bullets, the Diplock courts, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement, none of which has brought the peace that we were told each one of them would bring. There are 12,000 British troops, 8,000 members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and 12,000 armed policemen in Northern Ireland. We are engaged in a civil war in Ireland. We are about to hear a statement on Yugoslavia. It is time that we learned the lesson that the rest of the world knows, which is that the problem in Northern Ireland is a British one and not an Irish problem in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman recited a litany of past events. In the context of developments in the Province I do not take the right hon. Gentleman's apocalyptic view. Those of us who took part in the talks did not make extravagant claims about what would happen in the context of peace. We were not engaged in a peace conference. The difference between the talks in which we have been engaged and some of the past events about which the right hon. Gentleman spoke is that the parties in Northern Ireland that participated in those talks will, I hope, have been sufficiently encouraged by the course of events to contemplate carrying matters forward at some future stage. I do not regard the conclusion of the talks as a setback in the way that the right hon. Gentleman did. In passing, may I say that he exaggerated the size of the security forces?

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): While I commiserate with my right hon. Friend on what one hopes is a suspension rather than the ending of these talks, may I ask him to confirm that no blame should be imputed to any of the political parties in Northern Ireland? After all, what other country grants to its neighbour the right to meddle in its domestic affairs? Is it not the case that it was within the power of the Irish Republic to lift the obstacles to the continuation of the talks—the 16 July meeting? Why did it not do so?

Mr. Brooke: I certainly concur with what my hon. Friend said about no blame attaching to any of those who participated in the talks. As to the conference on 16 July, that was a clear fixture, which was established in the minds of everybody taking part in the talks, not only when I announced them on 26 March but when I specified the date on 26 April.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that if further talks on the future of Northern Ireland are to have any chance of success, it would be better to state honestly at the outset the ultimate objective and the means of achieving it? As the choice is basically between two mutually exclusive objectives—the preservation of the unity of the United Kingdom and the restoration of the unity of Ireland—should not the means of deciding and determining the achievements of the objective be the democratic consent of the people of 32 counties rather than of six counties?

Mr. Brooke: The objective with which all those taking part in the talks were concerned was to address a series of relationships specified in my statement on 26 March. It has consistently been the view of the Government that we need to find workable and durable arrangements and, in particular, ones capable of enjoying widespread support. I have the advantage over the hon. Gentleman in having heard the exchanges among the parties, and I continue to be impressed by them, in that each of the two traditions understood the position of the other.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): If these talks were so robust and constructive, and made as much progress as my right hon. Friend encouragingly stated, can he explain to the House, because some of us are feeling exasperated as we listen, why the politicians locally just cannot go on talking?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend will recall that, when we set out the basis for the talks in my statement of 26 March, we set out the ground rules that had been hammered out among all the parties over a considerable time and which all of them were able to endorse and sustain. I hope that if I approach the parties a little later this year about the possibility of entering talks again, of starting fresh talks, I shall receive the same warm welcome as on the previous occasion. We shall need to renegotiate the basis on which we do so. All those who have taken part in the talks so far think that we may wish to vary some of the elements of procedure.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that next Thursday we shall have Northern Ireland questions, and that there may be a further opportunity on the Consolidated Fund Bill, which we shall debate before the recess, for this matter to be raised again.

Statement—Mr. Secretary Hurd.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member was here when I had my altercation with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I shall take points of order later.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Please sit down.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after the statements. I will not take them now.

Yugoslavia

4.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a short statement about the position in Yugoslavia, which remains dangerous. It seemed that this morning events in Slovenia and Croatia were escalating out of control, and the army is no longer under the effective control of the political authorities.

A large number of armoured vehicles left Belgrade early this morning, moving towards Croatia and Slovenia. There can be little doubt that the Yugoslav army, or at least some of its senior commanders, are intent on further military action against Slovenia. This action disregards international opinion and overturns the ceasefire agreement negotiated over the weekend by the two EC troika missions, and it undermines the efforts of the federal authorities themselves.

Yesterday afternoon, the newly appointed President of Yugoslavia, Mr. Mesic, proposed a five-point plan, consisting of an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of the forces on both sides to barracks, the release of prisoners, the establishment of conditions for a long-term ceasefire and the involvement of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe observers. That was accepted by the Slovene authorities.

Since earlier this morning, there has been intense further diplomatic activity to prevent further bloodshed. I have several times today spoken to the German Foreign Minister, who attempted to mediate yesterday, and I have also spoken to the Dutch Foreign Minister who holds the presidency of the EC. I have spoken to the President of Yugoslavia, President Mesic in Zagreb, and the Foreign Minister of Slovenia in Ljubljana, who urged me to mobilise all possible diplomatic pressure to prevent a further military movement against Croatia and Slovenia.

I then telephoned the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Mr. Loncar, and told him that the use of force would bring disaster on Yugoslavia. He told me that he and the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Mr. Markovic, who are still in Belgrade, were trying to negotiate with the army and the Slovenian authorities to breathe new life into the five-point plan agreed yesterday. I have sent a message to the Yugoslav Defence Minister, calling on the armed forces to exercise restraint. We are in direct touch with the Americans, French and others, including about the possibility of an early meeting of the Security Council. Senior officials of the CSCE are meeting in Prague today to consider further steps, in particular the arrangements which would be needed to underpin a ceasefire and military disengagement, as soon as the situation on the ground permits this.

To sum up, Yugoslavia's problems cannot be resolved by force, and further military action will lead inevitably to widespread bloodshed. The army cannot hold Yugoslavia together in this way. Indeed, it has accelerated its disintegration. The old system is in an advanced state of decay and cannot survive. It may no longer be possible to hold the whole country together, though it is equally hard to see how the dismemberment of Yugoslavia could be brought about by peaceful means. In the end, the peoples of Yugoslavia, not outside powers, will decide on their relationship with one another, but certainly the necessary discussion on the country's future cannot resume until the

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

military return to their barracks and place themselves once again under full civilian control, as in all democratic countries. I appeal to them to desist from a military adventure which is bound in the end to be disastrous.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and welcome the actions that he has been taking to try to help to resolve this serious crisis.

The Opposition welcome the action being taken to ensure the safe departure of United Kingdom holiday-makers and other nationals from Yugoslavia and we ask if the House could be kept informed on those actions.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that any solution to the crisis and any long-term solution for the aspirations of the peoples and nationalities of Yugoslavia should be based on negotiation and consent and not on unilateral action on anyone's part? There can be no justification for the Yugoslav army to take action unless in response to a clear and immediate military threat, which plainly does not exist. In any event, the army must always act under the orders of the civilian power, and not unilaterally. Unilateral action amounts to a military putsch, and cannot be labelled a restoration of order. As the right hon. Gentleman has said, it is essential that the positive proposals of the Yugoslav President, and the efforts of the Prime Minister, be given a chance to work.

I welcomed what the right hon. Gentleman said about the possibility of a meeting of the Security Council. In the light of any such meeting, would the Government consider proposing the invocation of article 34 of the United Nations charter, under which the Security Council

"can investigate a dispute which might lead to international friction . . . in order to determine whether the continuance of the situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security"?

We also hope that continual efforts will be made by the European Community troika, and that something may result from the meeting in Prague today of the officials of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

This crisis could not only engulf Yugoslavia, but threaten the stability of the Balkans and areas well beyond that. We must stand ready to do all that we can to help to resolve it. Peaceful reform, not violence, must determine the future of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's comments. British holidaymakers have now been advised to leave all parts of Yugoslavia; I think that that is in the interests of safety. I re-read article 34 this morning, and, to my untutored eye, it seems apt for the occasion. There is also a possibility that the Yugoslav President himself, Mr. Mesic, might invoke a meeting of the Security Council.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will allow questions on the Foreign Secretary's statement to continue until 4.30; we shall then move on to the next two debates, which are time-limited.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Can my right hon. Friend confirm the truth of a Reuters report that EC Foreign Ministers are considering recognising the independent status of Slovenia and Croatia—or are threatening to do so—unless the Belgrade war machine is halted?

My right hon. Friend speaks of the old system in Yugoslavia not surviving, and of its being full of decay. That is entirely right. It is absolutely vital to ensure, in all the encouragement and support that we give, that the bloodshed is at least limited. We must show that our minds are on the ability of these independent democratic republics to come together in their own freely formed confederation or federation, rather than being ruled by a bankrupt and out-of-date dictatorship.

Mr. Hurd: At the moment—I say, "at the moment" —the two republics do not satisfy our criteria for recognition, but, obviously, we keep an eye on that all the time. I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend's second point.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that we are witnessing in Slovenia the same old-style, brutal communist repression that we saw in Budapest, Prague and Berlin? Does he accept that the Minister of State was mistaken when he told me on 22 May, here in the Chamber, that the European Community really had no role in Yugoslavia? Have not both the United Kingdom and the European Community collectively failed properly to work out a democratic and effective response to events in Yugoslavia that were forecast for quite a long time?

Finally, may I take up the point made by the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell)? Does the Foreign Secretary recall that the referendum in Slovenia produced a 90 per cent. figure in favour of independence, and that there was a similar result in Croatia? Will he promise us that he will recommend our EC partners seriously to consider directly recognising the Slovenian and Croatian claims for independence?

Mr. Hurd: I think that the hon. Gentleman has it not quite right. It is not for the European Community to do as he said and devise a political structure for Yugoslavia. It is a European country bordering on the frontiers of the Community and it—or a large part of it—is in danger of being submerged by a military force outside constitutional control. It is also in danger of settling into a period of civil conflict and bloodshed. It is perfectly right and reasonable that, in those circumstances, the European Community should see whether it can help. It has helped. It has brought together the framework of an agreement which all concerned have accepted in principle, although it has not so far worked fully on the ground. However, that is reason not for desisting but for carrying on, while not exaggerating the role that we can play.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I believe that, throughout the House, there will be widespread applause for the calm and prudent manner with which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is addressing this problem. The applause will be all the greater because we realise what real limitations there are on this country or our Community partners in trying to influence events within Yugoslavia. I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's proposition that it is not within our competence to devise a political structure for that country. However, in the spirit

of diplomatic courtesy, will my right hon. Friend leave with the civil and military authorities in Belgrade the time-honoured words of Charles Stewart Parnell:

"No man has a right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation"?

What is sought in equity by Slovenia today will be sought by Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and all those who rebel against the authority of the super-state.

Mr. Hurd: As my right hon. Friend said, I am well aware of the limitations on what we can do. We are all extremely anxious about the immediate situation. I am also anxious about the prospect of Yugoslavia settling into a sort of violent anarchy, with the villages and towns in which different communities live side by side breaking out in spasmodic violence. That future would be grim indeed. Therefore, although we cannot devise a future for Yugoslavia, we can help. We have been asked by Yugoslavia—I was asked again this morning by the President of Yugoslavia—to see what we can do to help create a pause and bring together those who alone can find the answer.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I was interested in what little content there was in the Secretary of State's statement. Will he clarify whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has now abandoned the shabby and duplicitous policy that he helped to contrive and implement in relation to Northern Ireland when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? Will he clarify whether he now believes in the right of peoples to self-determination and the impropriety of interference from outside countries?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that the parallels are particularly close, and I have no more reason to regret the decisions and policies that the Government followed four or five years ago than I have to regret the excellent policies now being pursued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): May I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend on the way in which he is addressing this difficult and dangerous problem? Does he see any role for the Western European Union—for example, in an observer capacity?

Mr. Hurd: One of the things that is being considered is whether, if there were a ceasefire, we could help in observing and thus to maintain it. I do not think that we can ask European observers from the Community or the WEU to go in until there is a ceasefire. Once a ceasefire were agreed, it might be perpetuated with the presence of observers, and I agree that the WEU might be the right place to organise that.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that, whatever happens henceforth, human rights are of the utmost importance? He referred to the agreement about the release of prisoners. Who was involved in that agreement, and what are the circumstances, as he knows them, of the prisoners?

Mr. Hurd: The agreement was reached last night in Ljubljana by the President of Yugoslavia, Mr. Mesic, and the Slovenian authorities. One of the points under consideration was the release of prisoners. As a result of skirmishes in the past few days, I imagine that many people from either side are being held.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his bold decision to talk on the telephone this morning to the Foreign Minister of Slovenia—a state that is not recognised, either de facto or de jure, by this country? Does he recall any precedent for Her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs speaking to such an official? In the circumstances, will he continue to keep under review Britain's recognition of Slovenia and Croatia—two provinces that are western, Roman Catholic and Austrian and Venetian in origin?

Mr. Hurd: I have spoken to many interesting and admirable people who are not Foreign Ministers of countries that we recognise. I spoke to Mr. Rupel yesterday and this morning; both were useful conversations. On my hon. Friend's serious point, we keep that under review.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the unsympathetic response of western Governments to Slovenia's declaration may have encouraged the Yugoslav military to think that they could proceed without resistance from the west? The right hon. Gentleman spoke of "disaster" if force were used. Is he making it clear to the House that there will be firm and total economic sanctions if the Yugoslav army proceeds into Slovenia and creates the mayhem that we all fear?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can sustain the first point. We have always made it clear that, in our view, the problem cannot be solved by the use of force. Everything that Britain, the United States and other western countries have said has included and stressed that point.

The hon. Gentleman is moving ahead a bit fast in his second point. If the whole of Yugoslavia were to fall into the hands of, shall we say, colonels, that would create a different situation in which the hon. Gentleman's point would have to be considered.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that much of the problem in Yugoslavia relates to the intransigence of Belgrade? In view of that, will he reconsider the policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Yugoslavia and regard the federation as an unworkable proposition?

Mr. Hurd: I said in my statement that the present structure has decayed past saving. I am sure that that is true. Equally, I am reluctant to imagine that the only future for the peoples of Yugoslavia is a series of small states quarrelling with each other, trying to invoke others in their quarrels and all depending in one way or another on the west for economic support. There must be some relationship—some effective working relationship—between those peoples, but only they can work it out, and they will have to do so on a quite different basis from the one that is now disintegrating.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): What part does the Foreign Secretary think that the conference on security and co-operation in Europe can play in this affair? Further, has he had exchanges or contacts with the Soviet Union?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, we have had exchanges at official level with the Soviet Union, which obviously is important in this matter. The CSCE emergency meeting of senior

[Mr. Hurd]

officials in Prague has just finished, but I do not have an account of what occurred. It has given those concerned an opportunity to make their views known to the Yugoslavs, who once again were put under the responsibility of explaining what is happening. I do not know what further can be achieved under the CSCE machinery, which is why we are not relying exclusively on it.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): On what terms of reference is the EC troika of Foreign Ministers operating and to whom is it answerable? Is its intervention considered to be an EC foreign policy intervention with the unanimous support of all 12 members, or have individual states the right to express a view contrary to that of the three gentlemen?

Mr. Hurd: It was agreed unanimously on Saturday in Luxembourg by the Heads of State and of Government that the three Foreign Ministers should go. Their remit was set out, discussed and agreed. They have twice achieved a bringing together in principle of the main leaders involved, but the writ or authority of those leaders does not operate fully on the ground. There is no difficulty or doubt about the remit of the EC troika which has our full support in that respect. There is no question of majority voting or of people being outvoted or disgruntled —it is something to which we all set our hands.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Yugoslav peoples, on the verge of having killed the devil of Stalinism, are now in danger of discovering the devil in themselves, and that the chief characteristic of that devil is a notoriously violent nationalism? We must be careful that we do not regard Serbian nationalism as somehow entirely different from that of Croatia and Slovenia. We must handle it with extreme care. I am glad that so far the Government have done so, but we must be aware of that characteristic of the Yugoslav area.

Mr. Hurd: We have learnt that one cannot suppress nationalist feeling or force it into a framework against which it revolts. However, we have also learnt the hard way in Europe this century that, if nationalist feeling is let rip and if there is no attempt at conciliation or no attempt to prevent that feeling getting completely out of hand, the result is continuous strife. We have solved that problem in the western part of our continent. Now that communism is out of the way, the great question for eastern and part of central Europe is whether they too can find a way of allowing nationalist feeling without permitting it to destroy societies in the way that it has in the past.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): At this time of crisis, does my right hon. Friend agree that Yugoslavia needs someone to act as a focal point and figurehead? Will he confirm that he has not overlooked the possible future role of Crown Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that it is for me to look at or to overlook the role of the Crown Prince. That must be a matter for the Yugoslavs.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Can we have some honesty for the record? Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the people of Slovenia and Croatia are on the record as saying that there must be a fundamental, structural adjustment in the relationships between the peoples within the present state of Yugoslavia, that they have attempted that adjustment by peaceful reform through the ballot box and that the only reason for the present violence is that the Yugoslav army prefers the bullet? Will the Secretary of State bring that to the attention of the Security Council, if it discusses the matter?

May I raise finally what the Secretary of State said earlier, to the effect that, so far, Slovenia does not accord with the criteria for recognition as an independent state by the United Kingdom? How does it fall short? It cannot be because of a failure to express its view of independence through the ballot box.

Mr. Hurd: The criteria include the effective control of territory and independence in foreign policy but, as I said to earlier questioners, we need to keep the matter under constant review. I agree broadly with the hon. Gentleman's first point. The present concern and the reason why we are considering with our friends recourse to the Security Council is precisely the danger of military action by the Yugoslav army, which my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Given the level of violence that has already taken place, is it not about as fruitful to try to reassemble Yugoslavia as it would be to put a soft-boiled egg together when it has been hit on the head with a heavy spoon? If my right hon. Friend wants the two republics to hang together, might it not be better for them to hang together with Austria rather than with Serbia, on which they seem to want to turn their backs at the moment?

Mr. Hurd: As I have said, I believe that the present structure is disintegrating past recall. When we consider that Slovenia is just about the only republic in Yugoslavia which has a relatively small number of non-Slovenes inside its borders, and that every other republic, including Croatia, has very large numbers of Serbs or others inside its frontiers, it is very hard to imagine a tidy repackaging of the type about which I occasionally read in some of our newspapers. Yugoslavia may not hold together in any form. It may be that, after having looked into the abyss, the people will want to work together on a new relationship. We cannot be sure of that or impose it, but perhaps we can help to create the pause in which such thinking and discussion can take place.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that, however restricted our ability to help in this tragedy, it is right and proper that we should do what little we can to bring an end to this appalling tragedy? Will he accept that both Slovenia and Croatia are part of the constitution of Yugoslavia, and that therein lies the problem? Its constitution cannot be changed without the unanimous support of all the republics that go to make up Yugoslavia. That problem must be overcome before we can bring about constructive change in that fine country.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those thoughts. The immediate point is that, partly under pressure from the EC, the Yugoslavs moved to appoint Mr. Mesic as President in the past few days—something for which we have been pressing for a long time because the interruption of that appointment was one of the difficulties. Now that this President is in touch with us and

speaking in his constitutional position as the President of Yugoslavia, we have to pay very careful attention to what he says.

Points of Order

4.32 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before I take points of order, I should remind hon. Members that, on 18 June, the House passed a resolution under which the two debates on estimates today would be limited—the first to three hours and the second up to 10 pm. I have had to balance the time given to the two statements against the legitimate interests of hon. Members who wish to participate in the debates about Iraqi refugees and about employment and unemployment. Let that be a balance.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. As you are aware, many hon. Members from Northern Ireland have spent many long hours at the talks that have now concluded. Today I saw a departure in the House from what we are supposed to do—or what I was instructed to do when I became a Member of Parliament—when a statement is made, which is to ask questions. One of the hon. Members from Northern Ireland read a lengthy statement, but I do not think that there was one question in it. As a result, other Northern Ireland Members were not called. The statement was important for all Northern Ireland Members. We feel that it would be happier for us if we knew the type of allocation that we were going to receive on statements on Northern Ireland so that we could work it accordingly.

Mr. Speaker: Today, I took the decision that the leaders of the parties would speak for their parties. I hope that that was not an unreasonable assumption to make. That is why I did not call other hon. Members from Ulster who were standing.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had a request for a statement about the visit near to the precincts of this House tomorrow of the odious French fascist, Mr. Le Pen, who is due to address a conference of the so-called European technical right at the Queen Elizabeth II centre? Should not someone from the Home Office say whether that person is to be allowed into the country, in view of the problems that could arise under the Public Order Act 1986? As the centre is so close to the precincts of the House —and no doubt carefully chosen for that purpose—would you not think it right to give warning to those people that they should not enter the democratic precincts of the Palace of Westminster?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for what goes on in the Queen Elizabeth II centre. The hon. and learned Gentleman should present his questions on entry and who has booked the centre to the Government. It is nothing to do with me.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Very rarely are you ever misguided, and certainly you are never wrong, but surely the issue of Yugoslavia, which touches upon Britain and the rest of Europe, should have been given more time. Sometimes we have an hour for questions on

[Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark]

quite trivial matters. Surely we could have spent at least an hour on such an important matter. How can it be right to cast the issue on one side after such a short time?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member would be the very first —indeed, he has been the very first—to complain when not called in debate.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Not at all, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, the hon. Member certainly has done that. I have to balance the desire of those who wish to ask questions against the desire of those who wish to make speeches. It is a difficult decision to take—*[Interruption.]* Do not argue with me, please, from a sedentary position. It is exceptional to have two statements, as we did today, and I judged that I had an obligation to protect the interests of those who wished to speak in the debates which are time limited.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, the hon. Member must not argue with me.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The occupant of the Chair should not impugn an hon. Member's honour.

Mr. Speaker: I do not impugn the hon. Gentleman's honour, but I have his letters.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It is quite wrong to do that.

Hon. Members: He is going.

Mr. Speaker: Every Speaker occasionally needs to be deaf, and sometimes blind.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This country fought fascism for six years. Can you advise us what steps can be taken to bring the Home Secretary to the House to try to justify a poisonous fascist agitator like Le Pen being allowed into this country? That sort of filth should be kept out.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Government. It is not a matter for me. The meeting will not take place here.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I have called the hon. Gentleman, but I will call him again.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I revert to the issue of Northern Ireland? Northern Ireland is one of the few subjects that draws six political parties in the House into its business. When there are two statements, one about part of the United Kingdom —Northern Ireland—and one about Yugoslavia, where we have little involvement, it seems strange that we give equal time to them both. May I suggest——

Mr. Speaker: No, I do not think that the hon. Member may. I have to make these difficult judgments. The hon. Gentleman, too, has complained in the past about not being called to speak in debates.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you help me by clarifying your earlier ruling? Were you, as a defender of Back Benchers, saying that you were prepared to call Back Benchers from the Labour and Conservative parties but not from the Northern Ireland parties to ask questions on the Northern Ireland statement?

Mr. Speaker: I did not say that at all. I said, as I hope that the whole House heard, that on this matter I thought it legitimate for the leaders of the Ulster parties to express the views of their respective parties. This is a United Kingdom Parliament, and the breakdown of the talks is a matter not only for Members from Northern Ireland but for the whole House of Commons.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your difficulties, but, on the other hand, it is not strange for Members of parties in the House not to see eye to eye with their Front-Bench spokesmen. We all recognise that that happens from time to time. May I ask for your guidance? Earlier, you rather suggested that, during Northern Ireland questions and in the appropriation debate, we could deal with issues arising from the Secretary of State's statement today—which I considered rather limited. Were you suggesting that the Chair will turn a blind eye and a deaf ear if we occasionally wander on those occasions?

Mr. Speaker: I certainly was not saying that, either. The hon. Member will have to ensure that his questions are in order. However, as a Member of considerable sophistication, he has never found difficulty in doing that. Yesterday, I managed to call in defence questions almost all the Members who, because of the pressure of time, were not called in the debate the previous day. I shall do my best during Northern Ireland questions next Thursday.

BILLS PRESENTED

Cardiff Bay Barrage (No. 2)

Mr. Secretary Hunt, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. David Mellor, Sir Wyn Roberts and Mr. Nicholas Bennett, presented a Bill to provide for the construction by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation of a barrage across the mouth of Cardiff Bay with an outer harbour and of a tidal lagoon and for related works; to make provision for the acquisition and use of land for the works; to make provision about the operation and management of the barrage, the outer harbour, the water impounded by the barrage and the lagoon; to require provision to be made for dealing with property damage caused by an alteration in groundwater levels occurring in consequence of the construction of the barrage and to enable other protective provisions to be made; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 201.]

Rights of Access to Neighbouring Land

Mr. John Ward presented a Bill to make provision for obtaining access to neighbouring land for the purposes of carrying out works; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 July and to be printed. [Bill 203.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions on statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY

That the draft United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (Limit on Borrowing) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

BUILDING SOCIETIES

That the draft Building Societies Act 1986 (Modifications) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Constitutional Reform

4.40 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to the succession, rights and responsibilities of the Crown; and for connected purposes.

Proposals for constitutional reform regularly appear on the parliamentary agenda—and so they should. During my eight years and more in Parliament there have been proposals for both wide-ranging reform and more narrow proposals to reform the House of Commons or the House of Lords. But not since 1981 has there been a proposal dealing specifically with the constitutional position of the Crown, and it is that part of our constitution which I seek to address in the Bill. I do not pretend that this is necessarily the most important constitutional proposal or the most important matter on which Parliament should legislate. None the less, it seems apropriate that we should discuss it now.

There are two elements to the Bill. One is more radical than the other. One is to change the law; the other is to clarify it. The principal proposal is to change the law—specifically, the law of succession—so that females have the same opportunity as males to ascend the British throne. That would—self-evidently—not be retrospective and should not be controversial either.

My proposal follows a similar proposal in the Succession to the Crown Bill presented to the House in 1981 and supported by six hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Miss Boothroyd), who is now Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes) and the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

The Bill would amend the Act of Settlement and the Union with Scotland Act 1706 to deal with this one specific matter. As it happens, it will not affect the succession for the next two generations, so it has no implications for those currently alive and in the current line of succession to the throne. I hope that no hon. Member would, on reflection, oppose the application of the principle of equal opportunities to the top job in the land.

The second, subsidiary proposal is in a way more modest and is certainly less novel, although I accept that it has aroused more interest. It is not a proposal to change the law, only to clarify it. It relates to the liability of the Crown to pay taxes. Because this issue has aroused widespread interest, I shall dwell slightly longer on this proposal, although I stress that it is only the secondary purpose of the Bill.

In 1971, when a Select Committee of the House was examining the royal finances, the Treasury asserted:

"As part of the Royal Prerogative, the Queen is not liable to pay tax unless Parliament says so either explicitly or by inevitable inference. There is no distinction for this purpose between the private and public aspects of the Sovereign."

From a period in the last century, in the reign of Queen Victoria, until earlier this century, the British monarchs paid tax on their personal and private wealth. Progressively, from 1910—as Philip Hall has discovered in his researches and as was explained in the "World in Action" programme last week—a series of exemptions have been negotiated and obtained. The position now is that the monarch—as monarch and as Duke of Lancaster

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

—pays no income tax, no inheritance tax, no capital gains tax, no capital transfer tax and no investment surcharges. The heir to the throne, as Duke of Cornwall, also pays no income tax on duchy income, although duchy income was also subject to tax until earlier this century. My Bill proposes a return to the previous position. It would bring all the private and personal income and assets of the monarch and the heir to the throne within the tax system.

It is no argument against the proposal to say that it is without precedent. It is not. It is, therefore, no argument against the proposal to say that it is unconstitutional. It has long been recognised that it is a constitutional fiction, at most, that taxes in a modern parliamentary democracy such as ours are paid to the Crown. They are decided by, paid to and spent by the Government, and the monarch's income is just as capable of parliamentary regulation as that of anyone else.

I must make it clear that the Bill does not apply to the civil list, which Parliament debates and votes on, or to other moneys granted to the Crown for its public duties —such as the money that Government Departments spend on maintaining the royal palaces, yacht, aeroplanes, train and the rest. They would remain untaxed, just as they are at present. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because they raise different issues, and if we succeed in bringing in the Bill today, we shall be making progress. At another time perhaps we may be able to consider other matters as well.

I have two reasons for wanting to introduce the Bill. The first is the straightforward case for constitutional reform. The second is the desire for social, financial and constitutional justice. As the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and as an individual, I cannot justify to people who have incomes just above the poverty line, and who pay taxes as they are required to do, the fact that the woman who, by common consent, is the richest woman in the country is exempt.

From the answers to the most precisely worded question in an opinion poll conducted by *The Independent on Sunday* in February, it would appear that 79 per cent. of the population support that view. I shall cite only two of the many reasons given in support of the proposal from among the letters that I have received. The first letter came from a lady in Coventry who wrote:

"I am 78 years of age, a widow, totally disabled, my income is £86 a week pensions, and I have to pay income tax. Why should the Queen be exempt?"

Another lady in West Yorkshire wrote:

"I am not anti-royal, but I feel it is immoral that anyone who owns as much as Her Majesty, or any member of the royal family, should be exempt from paying taxes. If we were all afforded this privilege we would have a much better standard of living."

We can all say amen to that. I agree with the sentiments of the second correspondent and, like her, I am not anti-royal. But in 1991 it seems to me that a review of the position is long overdue—and that we should clarify the law and put the monarch in a private capacity in the same position as her subjects.

The Bill should be considered on its merits and, on its merits, the case for these changes seems to me to be overwhelming.

Today we are testing the parliamentary temperature for the first time in recent years. Some have said that it may be a step into hot water. My reply is that it is entirely proper for Parliament to consider the position of the monarch, as it has regularly considered the constitutional position, rights and duties of the monarch. If Parliament had not done that over the years, we should not have the constitutional democracy that we have today.

The purpose of my Bill is, therefore, to reform and modernise the monarchy, not to remove it. I—and many others who are not republicans and who think that the present monarch has done an exemplary, conscientious and admirable job—believe that none the less, on these issues, the time has come for change.

This is not a Bill motivated by the politics of envy; it is a Bill motivated by the desire for justice and for constitutional reform.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Simon Hughes and Mr. Peter Archer.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Mr. Simon Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the succession, rights and responsibilities of the Crown; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday next and to be printed. [Bill 204.]

ESTIMATES DAY

[2nd ALLOTTED DAY]

Estimates 1991-92

Class II, Vote 5

[Relevant document: The Second Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee of Session 1990-91 on Aid to Iraqi refugees (House of Commons Paper No. 528).]

Iraqi Refugees

Motion made, and Question proposed.

That a further sum, not exceeding £910,873,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Overseas Development Administration under the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 on the official UK aid programme; economic assistance to Eastern Europe and the USSR; and global environmental assistance; including financial and technical assistance to governments, institutions, voluntary agencies and individuals; pensions and allowances in respect of overseas service including contributions to pension funds; capital and other subscriptions and contributions, including payments under guarantee, to multilateral development banks and other international and regional bodies; emergency, refugee and other relief assistance; loans to the Commonwealth Development Corporation; and running costs, related capital expenditure and other administrative costs including for the Natural Resources Institute (an executive agency).—*[Mr. Douglas Hogg.]*

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that the debate will end in three hours, that is, at 7.50 pm. In view of the time element, I ask hon. Members who wish to participate to do so briefly please.

4.50 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Four months after the end of the Kuwait war, millions of people in Iraq continue to live through a horrific nightmare. The human tragedy in Iraqi Kurdistan has been vividly portrayed and we have witnessed it on our television screens. However, another tragedy that is possibly more appalling has been unfolding in southern Iraq without the benefit of the television cameras. It is, therefore, appropriate that the House should have a short debate this afternoon on the Iraqi refugee issue.

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs is grateful that time has been made available for a discussion on the brief initial report produced by the Committee following its recent visit to nine middle east countries, including Iraq and Turkey. Some members of the Select Committee visited the Iranian refugee camps for the Shi'ite refugees and the Committee is grateful to everyone who assisted us, including the Iranian authorities, in that visit and in the associated visits in the middle east.

As the report is merely a short initial report, it seeks to do no more than to make observations and raise questions which we hope will help the House when it examines some of the enormous and awesome issues raised by the Iraqi refugee crisis and associated upheavals in the world.

Our report makes four main observations. The first is that, until and unless there are effective United Nations forces in both the north and south of Iraq, it would be wrong for the coalition forces which have been safeguarding the Iraqi Kurds and the Turkomans in the north to leave. Between the Committee reaching that view and the publication of the document, the American and British Governments have endorsed a similar view.

We were glad to hear the views and hopes of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who emphasised on 25 June that before there was any withdrawal of coalition forces there should be four conditions: clear United Nations forces on the ground, clear warnings that renewed repression would be met with the severest response, a continuing deterrent military presence in the region and, finally, the maintenance of sanctions against the Iraqi regime. In other words, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister endorsed the view held by many of us, that while the United Nations security guard force is building up—I understand that about 400 men should be in place by mid July, which is not enough—we will have to consider new structures and ways to safeguard those people to prevent another horrific round of retreats to the hills with the associated starvation and deprivation.

The report's second observation is that the refugee crisis is far from over. The Kurds continue to live in fear. Of course, there is hopeful talk of a deal with Saddam Hussein. However, all of us who have watched that man perform over recent months and years must reach the obvious conclusion about the value of any agreement, dealings or undertakings into which he may enter. We would place a very low value on such undertakings.

In the south, thousands of Shia are locked in the marshes. They cannot decide where to go and constantly fear harassment from Iraqi troops. We have received reports that 800,000 people are affected, but new information from aerial photographs is that the figure may be considerably less and that perhaps 50,000 or 60,000 people are affected. We simply do not know the correct number. However, tens of thousands of people are locked in the marshes and do not know whether to go forward or back. They are living in trembling fear. It is obvious to the House, was obvious to the Select Committee, and I hope is obvious to the international community, that there will be no lasting solution to the endless fear and terror of those people while Saddam Hussein remains in power.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I agree totally with the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) that there will be no peace in Iraq while Saddam Hussein remains in power. Does not that mean that we should be somewhat critical of the allies' decision to terminate the war when they did? I recognise the difficulties and the case is not clear cut, but within the Security Council resolutions for peace and security in the area there was undoubtedly a case to do what the allies rightly decided to do with regard to Germany in 1945.

Mr. Howell: That is very much a matter for debate. My view is rather close to that of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), but I must not anticipate a longer and more substantial report from the Select Committee on the security situation in the middle east following the liberation of Kuwait. I am aware that many people share the hon. Gentleman's view.

We must bear in mind that whatever arrangements or dispositions we make for troops—be they UN security forces or whatever—to protect the refugees, those arrangements are temporary because those people will live

[Mr. Howell]

in fear whatever we do so long as there is a violent dictator in Baghdad whose habits, character and track record have been to persecute and kill.

The Select Committee's third observation is that the great refugee crisis has placed a huge strain on the Overseas Development Administration. We have high praise for the way in which the ODA has reacted in trying to meet the crisis. We must recognise, as I am sure the ODA recognises, that the Government Department, in addition to the Iraqi refugee crisis, is meeting four other huge crises of disruption, pressure and potential disaster around the world. Although there have been the horrors of starvation, killing and dying in Iraq, such things are happening on as great a scale, even on a more evil and terrifying scale, as a result of natural forces in the Horn of Africa. There are horrors in Bangladesh, where vast storms caused the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

Finally, the ODA is the lead Department in coping with developments and in encouraging democratic development throughout eastern Europe. That objective is by no means yet secure and much work and effort will have to be expended on it. That objective may not be on the same scale as the tragedy of the others, but it is a major task. Let us hope that it does not become a tragedy, as it will if the trouble in the Balkans affects the rest of eastern Europe. The ODA is under enormous strain and we welcome the decision to review the way in which it can meet those huge burdens in future.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) has rightly underlined the huge task facing the ODA. Is there not a case for lifting sanctions, particularly in relation to electricity generating equipment? Until electricity is flowing, it will be impossible to cope with a situation in which, according to Harvard medical school, more than 170,000 children under the age of five will die this year. Whatever one thinks about sanctions, that is the root of the matter.

Mr. Howell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman gets a chance to develop that thought during the debate because he refers to an important and difficult balance. All humanitarian instincts point us towards doing everything possible to avoid the prospects that he has described, but there is the equally terrible thought that, if Saddam Hussein is let off the hook and is allowed to use his resources, from selling oil, for example, to rearm and re-equip, he will carry on killing. One must balance one against the other. I do not pretend that the Committee has found the answer to the question of how to ensure that humanitarian considerations prevail without also ensuring that new resources fall into the hands of that man, who is still in office and apparently in total control of inner Iraq and ready to spend more money on more weapons to carry out more killings, more persecution and more harassment. That is the difficulty. We must watch the practices and policies of the Government of Iraq—that is the policy of the United Nations—when undertaking any review of the present sanctions and embargo provisions.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman also consider the question of our relations with dictators such as Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime over many years? After all, the British Government effectively loaned that regime £1 billion over the past 10 years and a great deal of Saddam Hussein's power and war machine was the product of close western support for his regine.

Mr. Howell: The hon. Gentleman is taking us, once again, into the broader area of middle eastern security and to the question of how on earth we can secure any improvements in future, after having failed to produce them in the past. The next report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs will look into that. Although we do not claim to have the ultimate wisdom, that will be the opportunity to raise such points.

The fourth observation of our immediate report on refugees was that the strains which have fallen on the ODA, which has struggled excellently to meet them, have fallen also on the international relief organisations. Our report points to ways in which the burdens and pressures on those organisations have led, despite much dedicated work by the people who work in them, to breakdowns in co-ordination and to a lack of effectiveness. We have outlined a number of suggestions and proposals about how the international relief organisations can be strengthened.

That leads me finally to the three questions that we raised beyond our observations. First, how can the international relief structures be better organised? A number of agencies are involved, including several United Nations' agencies led by the UN Disaster Relief Office. We questioned whether that agency could perform its task in the way that it should. We welcome the idea that was suggested by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in concert with the German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, that an individual should be appointed co-ordinator for disaster relief work in the United Nations —a sort of overlord—to begin to bring together the different strands of work that some of my hon. Friends who visited the area found sadly disconnected and, in some places, disordered.

Our second question is, can the international organisations, especially the United Nations, deliver help on the scale that is required when humanitarian disasters occur, such as the man-made or dictator-caused disaster in Iraq? The difficulty is that the United Nations is now being asked to deliver security as well as supplies, help and succour to refugees on a scale and with a prominence and effectiveness that, in its present form, it is simply not equipped to meet. The time may well have come to rethink the structure of the international relief agencies so that they can co-ordinate their efforts, work more effectively with the different donor nations and meet the now big demands of the international community more effectively.

The third question is even bigger and leads to the edges of the refugee report and to wider political questions. It is whether it is possible to clarify the powers of the United Nations and its blessed agencies or direct agencies to intervene. That is the question at the edges of this tragic saga. The sticking point or the original base point is chapter 1, article 2, paragraph 7 of the charter of the United Nations, as qualified by chapter 7, which lays down the degree to which, if at all, there can be intervention in the domestic and internal affairs of a nation. Certain derogations are suggested relating to humanitarian aid if there is a threat of genocide or if—this is a loose definition —the peace, security and stability of the surrounding area

and the international order is threatened. That is not a question that we can consider fully in a report on refugees, but our report concluded:

"if clearer rules were established"—

in relation to intervention by the United Nations and its agencies—

". . . not only might grinding, endless and bloody conflicts all over the world be brought to an end but also the refugee relief process could be simplified."

We hope that our views will be of use to the House. The time has come for a new agenda for looking at the key problems of disaster relief. I am sure that the whole Committee hopes that its short report will start the thinking processes and the answering of the questions, which will lead to a more effective ability to respond both nationally and internationally—despite all that has been done in tremendously difficult circumstances—to the disasters that we must realistically, if pessimistically, admit lie ahead. There have been many disasters in the present global order and it looks as though there will be more. We shall need more vigorous co-ordination and more effective means to meet them.

5.6 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I welcome the clear statement of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that, unless and until a United Nations force can provide effective safeguards for the Kurds and the other persecuted people of north and south Iraq, it would be wrong for the coalition forces to leave them to the mercy of Saddam Hussein. The Select Committee was repeatedly told by refugees that they would not return to their own country until Saddam Hussein was removed from power. I have heard that view on many occasions, and who can criticise those people for expressing that view? Many of us believe that the danger will persist so long as Saddam Hussein continues his evil and brutal tyranny in Iraq and continues to thumb his nose at the United Nations by denying its inspectors access to Iraqi nuclear equipment. He must take the consequences of such actions.

Evidence of torture and repression is legion. On 27 May *The Independent* headed Robert Fisk's recent report on his visit to the cells of Iraq's secret police in Dihok:

"A testimony to brutality written in blood".

The article stated:

"The last young women to be imprisoned here died in these fetid cells two months ago. The Peshmerga say they found three of their bodies, naked and with their hands bound, on the floor. One of the girls was 12 years old. Another, older woman had been gang-raped and died later. Anyone who wants to now what propelled the one and a half million Kurds to flee their homes has only to visit Dihok."

For eight years I have chaired CARDRI, the Campaign Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq. We have continually exposed the brutality of the Baath regime and have linked up with those in Iraq who are struggling for human and democratic rights in immensely difficult and dangerous conditions. Many have since died. In 1983 an Iraqi mother told us about her son, who was typical of so many thousands of people who have died in Iraq. He was a medical student who went out one day and never returned. Many months later she was told to go to the mortuary and collect his body. She was led to the room where the body was to be found and she said:

"When I entered and saw what was inside, I could not believe that there are people who could do such things to other human beings. I looked around and saw nine bodies. My son was in a chair. He had blood all over him, his body was eaten away and bleeding. I looked at the others stretched out on the floor . . . all burnt . . . one of them had his chest slit with a knife . . . another's body carried the marks of a hot domestic iron all over his head to his feet . . . everyone was burnt in a different way. Another one had his legs cut off with an axe. His arms were also axed. One of them had his eyes gouged out and his nose and ears cut off".

There were so many of those chilling accounts that at times, over the years, I found them difficult to believe. But now, the horrors of Saddam's Iraq will continue to shock and astound the world. The stories of the two Britons, Doug Brand and Patrick Trigg, are yet more evidence that nothing has changed. As in the past, Saddam's policy is to intimidate, persecute and kill.

It is therefore to the shame of this Government and others throughout the world that, even after Halabja in 1988, Saddam Hussein was still treated as a valued trading partner. The Ministry of Defence allowed the sale to Iraq of a design for a missile testing concrete bunker, even though there was a ban on arms sales to Iraq. That is yet another example of turning a blind eye to the spirit of the regulations. I hope that a valuable lesson has been learnt.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall that she and I worked together for many years in CARDRI in support of the democratic opposition in Iraq? As early as the 1980s we asked the British Government to cease their trading practices with Iraq because they were allowing that brutal regime to develop and to attack the Kurdish people. Does my hon. Friend not think that now is the time to recognise that there must be some sanity in the arms trade and trading matters in general to protect people and human rights from Governments such as the Baath regime in Iraq?

Mrs. Clwyd: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I remember well that in 1988 he, I and others argued in this House that the Government should not double export credit guarantees to Iraq. Our pleas were totally ignored and the Government went ahead and doubled export credit guarantees. Too often, one Government Department has said one thing while another has done precisely the opposite with regard to countries controlled by oppressive tyrants.

The Select Committee highlights the problems of the refugee crisis. I saw for myself the terrible suffering of the refugees who had fled in their millions to the border between Iran and Iraq. The freezing cold, rain and mud have gone and the heat and dust have taken their place. Thankfully, most refugees now have shelter, food and safety.

Save the Children Fund gives its observations and experiences in an interesting report on Iraq, and notes that the death rate was high in Turkey, with deaths estimated at 50,000, whereas in Iran the death rate was, by all accounts, slight. While Turkey continued to receive massive support from many Governments, including aircraft, millions of pounds of material supplies and hundreds of medical personnel, Iran—with the bulk of the refugees—received very little. Iran did not receive the assistance that it should have been given to deal with a much larger number of refugees.

Estimates of the number of refugees who have returned to Iraq vary widely. The Iranians believe that up to 750,000 people will stay behind in Iran even if an agreement between the Kurds and the Iraq Government is reached. The remaining refugee camps now need to be equipped for the winter conditions to come. Aid

[Mrs. Clwyd]

organisations are concerned that the present tent accommodation in the north-west provinces would be totally inadequate for those conditions.

Displaced Kurdish people in the regions of Iraq bordering the north-east frontier with Iran are reported by many people to be facing dire health and nutritional conditions. It is still not clear how many Shi'ites have been displaced in southern Iraq. Aid agencies are concerned, as is the Select Committee, that between 400,000 and 600,000 people many have taken refuge in the marshes and that they have not received the same humanitarian attention.

As the Chairman of the Select Committee said, the refugee crisis is far from over. Up to a million refugees are still in Iran and tens of thousands of others are in Iraq. They are in no man's land, camped out on the rubble of the towns destroyed by Saddam Hussein in 1987. They still need medicines and food and it is regrettable that the British Government could not provide safe havens for them because of American opposition.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): If the safe areas cannot be protected by United Nations armed forces, it is useless to leave the refugees to their fate at the hands of Saddam Hussein.

Mrs. Clwyd: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not here earlier when I said that I thought that it was important for the allies to stay to protect the Kurds and other groups.

Sir Alan Glyn: The hon. Lady did not mention armed forces.

Mrs. Clwyd: Indeed I did.

The refugees who need medicines and food but who are not covered by any of the aid agencies should be dealt with urgently.

As a Kurdish political leader emphasised when the offer of negotiations was first made by Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish question is not a refugee problem and should not become one. It is a political problem. Although the first stage of the refugee crisis is over, the long-term future of the Kurds and Shi'ites remains to be settled. As the Select Committee says, it leaves

"the grim prospect of a seemingly unending refugee operation of Palestinian proportions".

When I first told the House that Saddam Hussein wanted to negotiate with the Kurds, hon. Members laughed. That was the level of scepticism with which Saddam Hussein's words were treated. The Kurdish leaders who had to stand by and watch their people die in their thousands had no option at that time but to take up the offer and the talks have now gone on for several weeks. The agreement that was brought back to Kurdistan from Baghdad demands that the Kurds cut direct ties with the west and unite with Saddam Hussein's Baath party to crush its enemies. The agreement includes the denunciation of the United States, Iran and Zionism, and the Kurds would need the Baath party's permission to contact outside Governments and organisations. Mr. Barzani of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan and Mr. Talibani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, along with the other political leaders in Kurdistan, rightly rejected those conditions as the obligations entailed in such an offer were clearly intolerable.

Once again, strengthened by the allies' agreement to support the deployment of a rapid reaction force to protect the Kurds, the Kurds are spelling out their own conditions. They stipulate that there can be no autonomy for the Kurds without democracy and human rights for Iraq as a whole. They have asked for the next stage of the negotiations to take place in Kurdistan rather than Baghdad. They have no intention of splitting off from the opposition to Saddam Hussein in Iraq because they know full well that they will have no long-term peace and stability unless there is peace and democracy in Iraq as a whole.

Although many of the issues raised by the Select Committee were debated in the Opposition debate on 14 May I am glad that we were able to share some of its concern—for instance, about the fact that the Overseas Development Administration is strapped for cash. As the Select Committee said, the aid programme contingency reserve has been subjected to severe strain. The Committee continued:

"this suggests that the ODA will have considerable difficulty in finding new money for further commitments entered into during the year".

The money that might have been used for long-term development purposes will need to be drawn on for emergency relief before the Treasury will provide new money. The Select Committee might have mentioned also that the overall aid budget has been slashed since 1979. It is still 11 per cent. lower in real terms than it was then. Despite continuing claims by the Government, that budget is stagnant in real terms.

The ODA lacks not only cash but staff, as we have continually pointed out. Each time we have pressed the Minister in the House we have created new jobs in the ODA's disaster and refugee unit. The numbers have risen from four to six, from six to nine and nine to 12, and I pay tribute to the staff of the unit, who had to deal with three major disasters at the same time.

We made several suggestions. We dealt with the charges for the relief effort as distributed from the Ministry of Defence to the ODA. We argued that the costs should be shared, as they are in some other countries, to reflect the training value of using the military in civilian disasters. We called for a mobile emergency volunteer force with selection and co-ordination in advance of a disaster. We called for a strengthening of the ODA's disaster unit so that it would have in-house expertise on aspects of disasters apart from rapid procurement.

We also emphasised the need to encourage a strengthening of the UN agencies most involved in responding to disasters. The UN has been criticised frequently, and often unfairly. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Ogata, told us at a meeting at the House yesterday that she accepted some of this criticism, but she emphasised again that the UN agencies involved in emergency operations were neither financed nor staffed to be able to meet large scale crises. She said that for every emergency the UN has to issue a fresh appeal, and pledges from donor nations come in much too slowly. She said:

"We cannot respond to emergencies on credit, or on shoestring budget living hand to mouth".

What ought we to do if we want the UN to perform more effectively in the future? First, donors must place at the disposal of the UN a standby financial reserve to pay for a response within hours of a recognised emergency. Stockpiles of basic relief items should be set up in locations easily accessible to air transport. A central databank

should be set up on a range of goods and services that the UN can offer or mobilise. A pool of international experts is needed to respond immediately to any emergency and could be linked with civil disaster relief groups of member Governments. In other words, we need a system that gives the UN the money, the goods and the people to respond rapidly and effectively to disasters.

UN agencies, especially the UN disaster relief organisation, already exist. We should strengthen that organisation before inventing new ones or dreaming up new supremos. We should give it the means to perform its proper role. Once the UN agencies are assured of enough cash and clout to operate effectively, it will be worth reviewing their mandates to strengthen their roles. We must ensure they can meet the emergency needs of people displaced in their own countries as well as the needs of refugees who flee across borders into others.

This debate is about Iraqi refugees, but according to the UN and many other observers all of Iraq is threatened by increasing malnutrition and disease. Unfortunately, it is doubtful whether the ending of sanctions, for which some argue, would much improve the lot of ordinary Iraqis, given the inflation in that country and Saddam Hussein's priorities.

Humanitarian relief is of course exempt from sanctions, but one of the problems is that the UN does not have enough people on the ground to monitor where the relief is going. A recent example involved 12 food lorries sent into Kurdistan to feed the Kurdish refugees. Six of them ended up feeding Iraqi military personnel and the other six ended up feeding Government supporters. Unless we can guarantee that this sort of relief does not fall into the wrong hands it will be difficult to ensure that humanitarian aid goes to the people for whom it is meant.

In April, questions were asked in the House about what steps the Government were taking to secure Saddam Hussein's trial under international law on charges of war crimes. The Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) that he was awaiting legal advice in the matter. Earlier, the Foreign Ministers of the European Community had called on the United Nations to consider putting Saddam Hussein and his senior aides on trial before an international court. A similar demand was made by the United States Senate foreign relations committee on 18 April. The United Nations secretary-general promised to refer the request to a special committee before taking a decision. That committee is apparently still deliberating. Why is it taking so long?

The world still has great expectations of the United Nations as a global institution which can provide the vision and the mechanism for reducing global tensions and promoting peace, for protecting human rights and promoting economic development in the third world. The debate about the future of the United Nations is now focusing around questions about the reform of its charter, the make-up of the Security Council and the role of the secretary-general. The Select Committee rightly asked whether the United Nation's power to intervene in the internal conflicts of nations ought to be clarified, and rightly suggested that if clearer rules were established for such intervention, it would mean that grinding, endless and bloody conflicts all over the world could be brought to an end.

I doubt whether anyone can argue convincingly any longer against the right of the world body to move in and interfere in what used to be regarded as internal national affairs so as to protect the human rights of oppressed minorities. One thing is certain: the world can never again sit on its hands and idly watch brutal dictators killing hundreds of thousands of their own people in cold blood.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I remind the House of Mr. Speaker's injunction that this is a short debate and that short speeches would therefore be appropriate. Sir Michael Jopling.

5.27 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I may have misheard you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that day has not yet arrived, so I fear that you have addressed me wrongly.

Six weeks ago, I visited Iran as a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, with a number of my colleagues —my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), and the hon. Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Doncaster, North (Mr. Welsh). We were able to see for ourselves some of the refugee camps, and we visited two of the Kurdish camps in north-west Iran—near Orumiyeh—and one Shi'ite camp in the south close to the ancient city of Shush.

I warmly support the Government's reaction to the Iraqi refugee crisis of recent months. I strongly support the Prime Minister's initiative on safe havens, and strongly welcome the recent assurances that coalition troops will not be withdrawn while a risk remains, especially in the north of Iraq.

The Iranian authorities at the camps warmly supported the United Kingdom's efforts to bring relief to the unfortunate people in the camps. The authorities greatly welcomed the fact that Britain was the third largest donor of assistance. I have no reason to suppose that we are not still the third largest. That aid greatly relieved the agony of the Kurdish and Shi'ite people.

My impression of the three camps was that things were going reasonably well. The Iranians seemed to be dealing adequately with the massive crisis which confronted them. I did not see obvious signs of starvation or disease. Conditions were primitive, but people seemed to have enough food and we were assured that the refugees in the camps had been vaccinated against the diseases which were thought to present the main dangers.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) spoke about the accommodation. Most people in the camps are housed in tents, and some are housed in disused buildings, some of which had been damaged in the Iran-Iraq war. We shall soon have to think about what will happen to the people in those camps during the winter. One rather good sign from the refugees to whom we spoke was that they were beginning to question the facilities. That showed that the first crisis was over. They rightly complained about the quality of the water and said that the clothes sent by the relief agencies were second-hand. They viewed that as insulting. They also complained about the quality of some of their food, especially the high-protein biscuits. However good those biscuits might have been for them, they did not like their taste.

At one of the camps, we were delighted to see that the Austrian military had set up what appeared to be an

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

efficient tented hospital. Three of my colleagues on that delegation are in their places, and I am sure that they will agree that, as British people, we were received with much enthusiasm in those refugee camps. Perhaps that was because Britain had played a major part in throwing Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. We asked them when they expected to go home to Iraq. The unanimous response from Kurds and Shi'ites alike was that under no circumstances would they return to their homes and villages until Saddam Hussein had been deposed. There was universal distrust and loathing for that man. As long as Saddam Hussein reigns in Iraq, the refugee problem will continue. If he launches an attack on the Shi'ites in the south, up to 800,000 more refugees could make a dash for the border.

If winter arrives before the refugees are prepared to return to their homes there will be another serious crisis. Urgent action is needed to prepare for winter, because there are many signs that at that time Saddam Hussein may still be in control in Baghdad. I hope that steps are being taken to prepare those camps for a dreadful winter, because people cannot face such weather in tents. Because of the shortage of time, we did not visit refugee camps in Turkey.

I think that all members of the group share my concern about the way in which such crises are handled. I came away with much admiration for the way in which the people employed by the aid agencies do their best with facilities that are to hand. They often receive a rush of emergency aid from well-wishers all over the world who want to make a contribution regardless of the quality or the need for the equipment and facilities that they send. That presents a serious problem.

In the face of emergencies, all developed countries ship out the nearest materials, whether they are needed or not. Aid administrators in Teheran told us that, to assuage public opinion, well-wishing developed nations tend to send unsuitable, unnecessary and unwanted equipment and manpower. We saw examples of that in Iraq.

We were told about a country which had sent military units, I think that it was two sapper units, to build facilities for the refugees. There had not been proper agreement about bringing those troops into Iran, and they sat in buses for two days before being allowed to leave the airport. We were told of a German helicopter fleet which had been reduced by half, I think by 10, by the time we arrived because there was nothing for it to do.

Those are examples of a lack of co-ordination. The primary need in the three camps that we visited was for specific drugs which were in extremely short supply. We asked for a list which was subsequently passed to our chargé d'affaires in Teheran. I understand that action was taken on that list. There are few ways of going through the necessary motions in the face of a crisis, such as the one faced by the Kurdish and Shi'ite refugees. The first need is to find out properly and accurately what is needed. The second need is to get agreement from the country concerned that it should be brought in, and where and when it should be brought in; the third is for the aid agencies to find whatever it is; and the fourth is to get it delivered into the country where it is needed.

Having got agreement from the country concerned, the aid agencies are expert in discovering where they can get hold of what is required and in shipping it in as quickly as possible. The Committee's report makes suggestions about this which I hope that the Government will note. I also hope that the Minister will treat this as a serious and urgent matter. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to it.

The technique of getting the necessary and required aid into a country in which a crisis has occurred as speedily as possible is all very well in a country such as Iran, where there is an efficient administration that knows what it wants and can find out what it is likely to want. It is a totally different matter in a country such as Mozambique, which a number of us visited in the latter part of last year. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney was with me on that visit, when we went to the north of the country, to the area controlled by that dreadful guerrilla organisation, RENAMO.

In that part of Mozambique, there is no administration, but there is abject poverty. We met refugees coming into the towns and villages who were cowed, hungry and impoverished people, dressed only in the bark of trees. I have never before seen such heart-searing examples of poverty. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) here, and he was with us on that occasion. It was a most dreadful experience. Those people were sustained by the good will of the world community, especially the United Nations and other international organisations.

Here we come to the basic problem, which is mentioned in the report. What should the world community do in such cases? To what extent is it permissible to move into a country without the full support of its Government, however inefficient or non-existent it might be? That is a relatively simple problem in Mozambique, but it does not take much imagination for my colleagues to realise that one could easily have a situation half way between that of Mozambique and that of Iraq. Dreadfully difficult decisions would have to be made and questions would have to be asked about the extent to which we could break article 2.7 of the United Nations charter, which says that it must not intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned this factor.

We have to think these problems through carefully, but we must think them through and find a better way to get emergency aid to people who need it, if possible without stepping over that most important line of domestic jurisdiction.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Is it not a bit farcical to worry about intervention in the internal affairs of another nation when we have bombed that nation back into the pre-industrial age?

Mr. Jopling: I do not remember us bombing anyone in Mozambique when I was there, and I remember no history of us doing so. That point is irrelevant to what I am saying, which is that we have to find better ways to get aid to people who need it in emergencies. This is not easy. The report of the Select Committee deals with it; I hope that the House will discuss it and that the Government will give a great deal of thought to these problems in the months that lie ahead.

5.45 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I congratulate the Select Committee on its report. As I am not a member of the Committee, I can say this to the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and his colleagues: the report is short, cogent and makes a number of specific references, and I hope that my speech will follow suit.

I am not among those who argue, with the benefit of hindsight, that the war in Iraq should have been prosecuted further. It was brilliantly conducted and stopped at the right time. However, since the end of the war I have been consistently critical of the stance adopted by the allies in the peace negotiations. I mention two incidents. One was allowing the Iraqi regime to use helicopters, and the other was what happened in the south. I was told by Iraqi eye witnesses that our troops stood by and waved through Saddam Hussein's forces on their way to the reoccupation of Basra.

I mention those two incidents not to cry over spilt milk, but to emphasise that we have a moral responsibility for the refugees, because they need not have become refugees. There was political misjudgment, particularly by the Americans, in believing that it would be a mistake to allow Shi'ites to gain the upper hand in the south because they would then ally with the old enemy of Iran. As the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said, there is a long history of sad neglect by western Governments of the problems of the Kurds. Despite that, neither the Kurdish nor Shi'ite populations, nor their leaders whom we have met, have ever argued the secessionist case. Instead, they have argued for the creation of a democratic state in Iraq. We were all hoping for that. Because mistakes were made in the peace, the refugee problem is not just of passing concern but the direct responsibility of those nations involved in the allied operation.

I have four points to make. First, the right hon. Member for Guildford is correct to say that the Government have already responded with a change of heart, as have the Americans, on the question of pulling out troops. It is obvious that the United Nations' forces are not adequate and that there can be no question of withdrawing allied forces until the United Nations can supply an adequate substitute.

In that connection, I hope that the Government have listened to the recommendations of Tony Parsons, our former ambassador at the United Nations, who has been arguing ever since the war, with increasing conviction, that the United Nations needs to go beyond its tradition of creating special peacekeeping forces at the behest of nation states. His suggestion is that we should be moving on to a post-cold war development, which will give the five permanent members of the Security Council the capacity to oversee the creation of an effective, United Nations, permanent, peacekeeping force, able to act on the authority of the Security Council rather than at the request of a nation state.

At a time when all of us, including the House of Commons and the eastern powers, are having to grapple with the problem of reduced defence budgets, here is a role for some of those whom I shall call redundant soldiers, both east and west, of the cold war line, who could be allocated to just such a UN, permanent, peace-keeping force.

Secondly, the report rightly refers to—disorganisation is too strong a word, but I forget the word that was used—the fact that so many different UN agencies deal with the refugee problem. The reports that we have received from the Quakers and the Save the Children Fund underline the fact that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been disappointed with the response to her voluntary appeal for funds. My complaint is that it is not right that that office should be dependent on voluntary appeals for funds. I hope that in the review of UN mechanisms some thought will be given to bringing the UNHCR's operations much more directly under the immediate responsibility of the UN machinery.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): On that critical point, would it not be a good idea if, as we said in the Select Committee's report, instead of waiting until things happen and then making an appeal, standby credits were automatically available as soon as the Security Council said that such help was necessary? In that way the UNCHR could draw on them without having to embark on the long drawn-out process of asking for funds and then getting only half of what is needed.

Sir David Steel: The hon. Gentleman has put forward one specific way of doing what I advocate. The begging bowl approach of the UNHCR in Geneva cannot continue.

Thirdly, I welcome what the Select Committee had to say about the relative financing of ODA funds both by the Ministry of Defence—a point some of us made after the war when the MOD kept sending the ODA bills for its activities, which the Select Committee rightly said should be sorted out—and by the Treasury. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley was correct on that point. Given the decline in the ODA budget during the past 10 years and, at the same time, the increased demands that have been placed on it by a series of international disasters, the Treasury should now be more forthcoming with funds for the ODA. The ODA funding sections of the report are important and we are entitled to press the Minister to give an instant reply to the thoughts of the Select Committee at the end of the debate rather than to take the traditional three months to reply. At any rate I prod him and entice him into doing so.

I said that I had four points. The fourth does not arise out of the report and the Select Committee's Chairman would no doubt argue that it falls outside the remit of the report. Hon. Members should be alarmed about the resumption of arms sales to the middle east by Britain, the United States, Korea, the Soviet Union—all manner of powers. It is interesting that on 20 June the House of Representatives passed a foreign aid authorisation Bill, unilaterally halting the sale of weapons to middle east countries until and unless some other major arms supplier resumes shipments, or until the recipient countries establish an arms control regime for themselves. That Bill is going to the Senate. It may be objected to by the Administration, but there is something deeply disturbing about the political rhetoric from President Bush, our Prime Minister and everybody that we must learn the lessons of the war and hold off in the arms race, while we have specific examples of arms contracts already being negotiated with different powers in the middle east.

I notice the strong contrast between the swift reaction of President Bush and his security advisers to the possible concealment of a nuclear capability by Saddam Hussein's

[Sir David Steel]

forces and the threat to engage in pinpoint bombing to destroy it, and the relatively lax approach to the acquisition of ordinary weapons by countries in the middle east. A double standard seems to be developing whereby western powers are prepared to stop the development and acquisition of sophisiticated weaponry by powers in the middle east, but are happy to sell them anything short of weapon systems that could be widely destructive to the rest of the world. That must stop. At a time when our defence industries are shrinking there is surely scope for turning some of those resources to the necessary construction and engineering work associated with the refugee problems.

5.54 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) has made some exceedingly good points on which we can all agree across party lines, particularly his last point about the need for arms control in the region, which the Foreign Affairs Select Committee will address in its forthcoming report which should be before the House in the next two or three weeks before it rises. When we took evidence we were appalled by the speed with which countries in the region are building up their arms. In particular, a number of the countries seem to have Scud C missiles, against which the Patriot missile provides no defence. That is an extraordinary worrying aspect of the problem to which we shall come in due course.

In the interests of comparative brevity and so as not to be too repetitive of remarks which have already been so excellently made by my colleagues whom I was privileged to be with when we visited the camps in Iran, let me select two points. First, the appalling problem of the Iraqi refugees is the result of the international community's failure to respond adequately to the evil of Saddam Hussein. Yes, of course there was the magnificent response of the United States forces with the British and other members of the coalition to the invasion of Kuwait and the remarkable success of the war aim, and yes, the United Nations—I believe for the first time—provided the cover of lawful authority for the coalition to use force to drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait but no further.

There could hardly have been greater international justification for going to war with Saddam Hussein, and there could hardly have been less sense in starting a war which did not finish him off along with his aggressive capability. Therefore, is there not something wrong with a United Nations process which could authorise a war so limited that the evil aggressor survives, mostly intact, to continue his aggression, to threaten the other nations in the region and to cause fear and terror to the refugees within his own country whom we are now considering?

If there is one major lesson that must be learnt from the whole tragic episode, it is surely that, if the power to deal with the breakdown of international law and order by the enforcement of its resolutions, particularly when occasioned by the invasion of one country by another in breach of those resolutions, is to remain vested in the United Nations itself, that power must be greatly strengthened. If the United Nations imposes sanctions upon any country for the breach of international laws, it must have at its command the effective power to enforce those laws.

It is said that the reason why the United Nations resolutions went no further than to authorise the driving of Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait is that, under chapter 1, article 2.7 of the UN charter, that august body is prevented from interfering in the domestic jurisdiction of any state, and that China was too concerned about a precedent for United Nations interference in Tibet and the Soviet Union was too concerned about the precedent for United Nations interference in its problems with the states within the union to allow more to be done.

In that case, if the United Nations is not to be a paper tiger or a toothless guard dog and thereby encourage aggression, either the UN must give up enforcement authority to NATO or some similar grouping or to action by the United States in a peacekeeping capacity, or it must change its rules to prevent China and the Soviet Union or any other permanent member of the Security Council in the future putting its concerns before the world order or the humanitarian needs of the moment.

In my view, the United Nations should draw some encouragement from its first hesitant military action in Kuwait, and should go on boldly to develop internal rules to allow intervention to end aggression—both the kind of action that was taken by Saddam Hussein when he invaded a neighbouring country, and the kind represented by his turning on ethnic groupings of his own people. In particular, such intervention should be permitted if genocide would otherwise be likely to occur.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is there not a possible halfway house which would avoid the wholesale breach of the principle of article 2.7? Could not that article be amended to allow the United Nations to interfere in a state's internal affairs if such interference arose from previous authorised actions taken by the Security Council?

Such an arrangement would have overcome the difficulty in Iraq. It was the intervention of the United Nations—through the authorising resolution, 678—that led to the conflict within the country.

Mr. Lawrence: That is an interesting suggestion; however, it would not cover circumstances in which a country that had not previously offended against the international rule of law did so for the first time.

What we are now discussing is precisely how such an extension of the United Nations' effective power can be achieved. It has already been asked in this debate whether a change in article 2.7 is necessary, or whether it is sufficient for the general authority of the United Nations declaration on human rights—which is there among other things to prevent genocide—to prevail over that article. Should any such United Nations involvement proceed by way of separate resolutions, specifying the need to ensure peace and stability in the region concerned? Such a resolution was adopted at the time of the Gulf war.

Let me state the obvious: in that instance, the use of the resolution did not prevent Saddam Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait with much of his republican guard and goodness knows how many divisions of his army intact; with hundreds of tanks; with 150 aeroplanes and 500 helicopters; with the capacity for nuclear, chemical and biological warfare; and with 100 Scud missiles.

Equally disturbing are the impertinent—but none the less deeply worrying—repeated Iraqi declarations of intent to reoccupy Kuwait, Iraq's refusal to allow inspections of its potential nuclear sites and the continuous broadcasts

on a number of radio stations throughout the region, telling their Arabic audience that the war had really been won by Saddam Hussein and that all declarations to the contrary were merely United States propaganda following that nation's defeat. All those developments have merely followed the adoption of the separate resolution: clearly, it did not solve the problem.

It would be presumptuous and impertinent of me to suggest at this stage that I had the answers, and I make no such suggestion. Surely, however, we can all agree that the UN's powers must be strengthened, and that this is a good time to do so. When the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs saw UN officials in Washington, we gained the strong impression that they were apologising for the fact that any military support had been necessary.

At a moment when the UN had just risen like a new born foal standing up for the first time—at a moment when the world should have been looking to that organisation for greater purpose and determination, and a wish to strengthen its approach—we were hearing apologies. We should watch that tendency carefully, and do what we can to strengthen the resolve of whoever succeeds Mr. Perez de Cuellar as UN Secretary-General.

My second point concerns the plight of more than 2 million refugees—mainly the Kurds in the north and the Shi'ites in the south—who have fled in terror from Saddam Hussein. It is time that the international community united to provide a more effective, more efficient and therefore more life-saving system to deal with humanitarian disasters of this kind, and also with national disasters. It was satisfying to hear from the mouths of the Iranians that the quality of the United Kingdom's response had been perceived as good, and also that, in terms of the quantity of emergency relief to Iran, we ranked third in the list of donors. I believe that we have contributed more than £80 million in humanitarian relief alone.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said that the Government's aid contribution had fallen below the gross national product level at which we are aiming. Let me tell the hon. Lady not only that we were thanked and praised for the amount of financial aid that we were providing, but that, throughout our visit, I heard no one say, "If only the British Government could provide more money." As further disasters occur, we may well have to find more money because we have given so much to the Iraqi refugees; but we are here debating aid for those refugees. *[Interruption.]* Let me assure the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, and any other doubters on the Opposition Front Bench, that no one else has brought to our attention any such complaint.

There can be little doubt that hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Iraqi lives have been saved by the Prime Minister's initiative in establishing safe havens where Iraqi citizens can be protected from attacks by the military forces, and by the deployment of between 3,000 and 5,000 British troops. Thousands of people, some of them starving, have been brought down from the mountains, fed and sheltered and provided with life-saving medicines.

Outside those havens, in the Iranian refugee camps, we found great cause for concern. What will happen when the bad weather comes—and, indeed, when boredom strikes, if it has not done so already? Tens of thousands of people are living in impossibly cramped conditions with nothing to do—many of them people of action, former members of the Peshmerga guerrilla group. If confidence does not return—sadly, the Select Committee did not think that it would, given the existing circumstances—action will be urgently needed.

What is needed, if efficiency is to be improved, and what is barely available in the case of the Iraqi refugees, is a United Nations force of sufficient strength to deter an aggressor from further action against his victims. The United States does not want its troops to stay in the Gulf, where they believe that they are not welcome and where they are terrified of developing a long-term commitment of the Vietnam kind. The British and the other coalition forces are similarly unenthusiastic, and feel unable to take on such a commitment. It is possible that the Turkish army, the Syrian army, another army or a combination of all those will have to provide for the protection of ethnic minorities in the region; certainly, a Gulf security system will have to be worked out. The next report of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, which is due shortly, will address that issue.

No one can deny that it is regrettable that comparatively few of the intended 500 United Nations field service officers have materialised. There are about 135 United Nations staff in Iraq, plus 70 seconded from Nordic non-governmental organisations and Governments, but there are only 48 field officers, of whom nine have now left.

That has meant that the coalition forces will have to remain, perhaps indefinitely, to provide reassurance for the Kurds so that they will return to their homes without fear. As we say in our report, it would be wrong for the coalition forces to leave them to the mercy of Saddam Hussein's troops. Something more must be done urgently for the United Nations to get its enforcement powers together.

The second element required is a far more efficient system of organising and distributing aid. Those of us who saw the Kurdish camps in Ziveh and the Shi'ite camp in Shush were most impressed by the work done by the NGOs to feed, shelter and provide medical treatment for the refugees. However, we heard stories about total lack of co-ordination, some of which have been mentioned in the debate. We hear such stories repeated in disaster after disaster.

We heard that sometimes the wrong type of tent or the wrong sort of food supplies are sent. Supplies that are surplus to requirements in one camp are sometimes not available in another camp where they are desperately needed. We heard about the duplication of medicines and sometimes the wrong sort of medicine, the sending of a large number of unnecessary helicopters and second-hand unserviceable equipment. We heard of the sending of high-energy biscuits when the need for them had passed and the only use for them was to use the wrappers to provide shelter and warmth.

We heard of dedicated NGOs duplicating each other's efforts and nearly getting in each other's way. One NGO group—I think that it was a French group—returned home in pique and disgust. We have heard of hesitancy from some sources in providing financial assistance because of uncertainty about the use to which it would be put. We understand that there are pressures against efficiency.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it not time to let somebody else speak?

Mr. Lawrence: There will be plenty of time. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) takes up an enormous amount of the House's time by asking all sorts of impenetrable questions. It would be much more helpful if he were to remain silent.

There is a desire for democratic Parliaments clearly to identify visible aid projects, like so many tonnes of wheat or so many helicopters, and they desire not to have their money disappear into book-keeping or be wasted because the distribution system from the ports is inadequate or wasteful.

All that points to a desperate need to have somebody or some groups to co-ordinate all the aid activities. It is astonishing that, in this electronic age, there seems not to have existed in this disaster a computerised information system to identify the places of urgent need, the sort of aid on offer and the areas where no offers of the right type of aid have yet been made. Such a system could co-ordinate the offers of aid with the correct areas. It is almost incredible that no computer appears to be planning the routes available for distribution and delivery vehicles.

We need a blueprint for future responses to international disasters. We need rules about when the Government of the disaster-riven country take control and when they do not. We need rules about who takes control when the Government of the country is incapable. We need a rule book of actions that can speedily bring together, co-ordinate and redirect the substantial aid that is available from the world at times of heartbreaking disaster, whether natural or manmade. It should not be necessary to start from scratch with every new disaster, learning the same lessons again.

The British Government, in co-operation with the British people, have acquitted themselves well in providing resources, assisting our NGOs, helping to co-ordinate European Community assistance, bringing about safe havens, in getting resolutions past the Security Council, pursuing an initiative with the Germans for the appointment of a senior United Nations co-ordinator and, of course, providing the military assistance necessary to end the instability and anarchy in the region. If the Government could convene a conference in the near future of all those involved in the recent emergency planning and field work to draw up a blueprint for the future, they will have made an outstanding contribution to the cause of humanity.

6.14 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Like many of my colleagues who visited the camps, I came away with a number of impressions. Many observations have been made by hon. Members who visited the camps and I do not want to repeat them.

I should like to draw to the attention of my hon. Friends and the Minister one or two observations about the position of the refugees before dealing with the broader issue, which is that the Kurdish and Shi'ite refugee problem is not only an aid problem but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said, a political problem. It is a problem of international order and political decision.

We must not let the House forget that the potential for a further huge influx of refugees is considerable. The Iran-Iraq border was heavily fortified during the eight-year war and, ironically, the bombing of all the bridges made movement of people across that border almost impossible. That has meant that the refugee problem in the south could be understated.

It is sickening to realise when one visits the camps that every refugee crisis, even if it is three quarters solved, leaves behind yet another residue of permanent refugees. In one of the camps that we went to see there were many thousands of Kurdish refugees who had been there since 1975. The Iranian authorities reminded us—I had forgotten but I am sure that other hon. Members have not—that they are permanently maintaining under their refugee programme 2·5 million refugees from the Afghan war. We have had many quarrels and differences with the Iranian regime, but we must compliment the Iranian authorities on their work in refugee camps. The Iranian Red Crescent is one of the most efficient and compassionate organisations. Iran opens its borders to large numbers of people.

It was pointed out to us by people representing United Nations agencies that, curiously, national Governments now feel a desperate need to respond to crises in a macho and virile way. There is almost an aid race in which every Government want to show their electorate that they are responding to the latest crisis. As a consequence, there is often a lack of co-ordination, duplication and considerable waste.

In an eloquent appeal, my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said that we need a form of investment in United Nations agencies so that we can co-ordinate our activities through the United Nations rather than conducting the aid race in a macho and virile way while Governments are attempting to prove that their aid programme is bigger, better and more effective than anybody else's.

The plight of the Kurds and the Shi'ites represents a broader political issue. We must admit that until we saw on our television screens the plight of the Kurds on the mountains there had been remarkably little interest in their dilemma. They have been a mild embarrassment to the international community for generations because they do not fit into an easy, tidy, nation-state pattern. They have been a special embarrassment to Iranian, Turkish and Iraqi Governments for some time. I must say—I hope that I do not enter a jarring note into a consensual debate—that that attitude was exemplified by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When he appeared before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on 30 January, I pressed him on the Government's attitude to autonomy for the Kurds and he could barely conceal his impatience. At the end of our exchange, the Chairman said:

> "I think the Minister is telling us we have enough on our plate!"

On 30 January, the Kurdish issue was not of great ministerial concern.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I do not have a record of our exchange, but I recall that the hon. Gentleman was suggesting that we should support a policy of creating an independent Kurdistan.

Mr. Rowlands: I have the record. I asked the Minister:

> "Is there not a case for championing some particular autonomy which would recognise the very distinctive . . . characteristics of the Kurdish people?"

I was not pressing for a Kurdish state; I was questioning whether the Kurds would be a problem. The Minister rightly said that we must maintain territorial integrity and national boundaries, but in January the general attitude was that the Kurds were a problem and an embarrassment. They became a global embarrassment only when we saw their suffering on our television screens.

Hon. Members have said that the Kurds and Shi'ites represent a new challenge to the way in which we conduct international affairs and to the new international order that may emerge in the wake of the Gulf war, but the United Nations seems to recognise international disorder only when there is an act of aggression by one state against another. Experience of Yugoslavia and Iraq shows that international regional disorder occurs not only when one state attacks another but when the inherent structural problems of the societies on which we base international order—the notion that nation states are inviolate—are not recognised by the international community. As the cement of the empire, in its broadest sense, dissolves at the end of the century, those issues will become increasingly prominent.

That problem is demonstrated by the disintegration of the Ethiopian empire and the emergence of traditional rivalries. The dissolving of the cement of the Soviet communist empire is causing similar tension and rivalry in traditional relationships. The same is happening in Yugoslavia and will happen in the middle east.

On our travels, I spent my time on planes reading one of the most authoritative accounts of the origins of Iraq. Everybody knew that we just drew lines on a map. Minutes of memoranda of the great debates on the birth of the artificial state of Iraq disclose chilling prophesies that now seem relevant, despite their being written 40 or 50 years ago. One internal commentator said:

> "You are flying in the face of four milleniums of history if you try to draw a line around Iraq and call it a political entity".

At the time of the birth of Iraq, the minutes of a Foreign and Commonwealtth Office official said:

> "Almost 2 million Shi'ite Moslems in Mesopotamia would not accept domination by the minority Sunni Moslem community yet no form of government has been envisaged which does not involve Sunni domination."

He described the nature of that domination as essentially military domination.

Although I am not saying that we should be trapped by history—50 or 60 years later, events may have made those early judgments wrong—it is chilling to note the assessments that were being made during the artificial creation of a state such as Iraq because, in different ways, they are now manifesting themselves. We must ask ourselves the awkward and painful question whether Saddam Hussein, whom we all detest and believe must go, is not at least partly the creature of the state that was created. If the answer is yes, do we say for ever and a day that a state that was artificially created for a host of wrong motives should be the basis on which we maintain international order? I realise what a dangerous minefield one walks through when one makes such comments, but, given the dissolution of empires in the late 20th century, these issues will crop up time and again.

I shall complete my brief historic footnote by saying that, curiously, the 1920 treaty of Sevres, which was drafted and approved but never implemented, recognised that such issues would arise and tried to write in autonomy for the Kurds, the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis—areas that have now become hot spots.

A number of hon. Members have asked to what extent the new international order will continue to uphold the principle of non-interference in nation states, especially if they are not necessarily cohesive or do not have sound bases of language, culture and national identities. That problem will not go away.

The dilemmas of the Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq, the fact that we have established safe havens and sent rapid deployment forces to defend them and to guarantee the rights of minorities within the inviolate nation state of Iraq point in the long term to a new international order based on, dare I say it, some form of world government. Unless we learn the lessons and realise that, I am afraid that this last episode will be a footnote in the sad history of Kurds rebelling and being betrayed.

6.27 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I believe that we have two lessons to learn from the Kurdistan refugee crisis: first, the potential effectiveness of the European Community as a powerful forum for initiative in foreign affairs; and, secondly, the key role that is being played by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

We all watched the events of the Kuwait campaign and the 100 hours to the ceasefire. That ceasefire has left Saddam Hussein in charge, but was due, after only 100 hours, in no small part to the scars of Vietnam on the American nation. We are all aware of the reluctance of the United States to become involved in foreign adventures, and its fears of getting bogged down.

In Europe, and in Britain in particular, the reaction was very different. The public were concerned. We were all extremely moved by scenes on our televisions of masses of civilian populations who were totally unprepared for their movement into the mountains. Rightly, in Europe there was a wave of humanitarian revulsion at what we were seeing, and a demand for immediate action.

The initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the European Community summit in Luxembourg on 8 April got the bandwagon going. The agreement between European Community leaders to take action caused the United States to make an active response, which we saw on 16 April with the joint announcement by the United States, France and Britain that they would send troops to northern Iraq to co-ordinate the relief work and to establish safe encampments. We now know that it met with considerable success. Most of the Kurdish civilians have come down from the mountains. Some went into the camps and are still there, but most have been moved back to their original homes in Iraqi Kurdistan. There has also been a European initiative to transport refugees back from Iran.

The lessons to learn are that we have a Prime Minister who has rapidly gained in international stature to give a lead in effective action on the world stage, and that the European nations, working in concert, carry a mighty diplomatic clout which can precipitate action on a world scale and can influence the United States to change its position.

However, problems remain. We must somehow maintain the confidence of the Kurds who have returned home and persuade them to stay put in their homes and to

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

feel secure. The allied forces in the area are currently providing that security, but there is a real fear of their withdrawal. However, the sending of United Nations guards to the area is no effective solution. That is exemplified by a letter sent by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 30 May to the president of the Security Council.

The annex to the letter contains descriptions of the deployment of those guards. For example, it states:

"The number of Guards in the Contingent will be kept under review as further units are dispatched, but will not exceed a total strength of 500."

When one considers the residual strength of the Iraqi armed forces and the vast size of the Kurdish populations involved, one realises that the number is wholly inadequate.

The annex to the letter continues:

"The number of Guards assigned to the various regions will be decided in consultation with the Government authorities concerned"—

which means mainly Iraq—

"but would not exceed 150 in any one region."

Again, that is wholly inadequate in view of the scale of the country.

It is even more farcical that the annex continues:

"United Nations Guards will be authorized to carry side-arms (pistols/revolvers), which will be provided by the Iraqi authorities".

Clearly, the United Nations guards can play only a symbolic role. They are poorly funded even for the limited job that they have been sent to do. I understand that a special fund has been established within the United Nations. It is interesting that the United Kingdom is the largest contributor and is way ahead of others—notably the United States. Will the Minister confirm the leading role that we are also playing in that respect?

To answer the question why a United Nations force has not been sent and why we are confined to the services of valiant doorkeepers, one has only to read *The Economist* of 22 June, which summed up the matter neatly:

"Neither the Soviet Union nor China would approve action"—

the dispatch of a United Nations force—

"on the Kurds' behalf in the full glare of the Security Council. They feared the precedent such intervention could set for, say, Tibet or the Baltic republics. Other countries, standing by the clause in the UN charter that bars it from internal disputes, felt the same."

That highlights the continuing practical limitations of the United Nations, which is, of course, bound up in the various legalities which were dealt with so well by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence). It is tragic that the United Nations did so well with the nation of Kuwait, but is largely paralysed over the internal problems of Iraq, notably those in Kurdistan.

It is clear that we must maintain a strong military presence until the establishment of an adequate intervention force by the allies. In particular, we must ensure that the airborne capacity is adequate for the task.

6.36 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I was also a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs which visited the refugee camps on the Iran-Iraq border about six weeks ago. We had the opportunity to talk to Kurdish refugees from the north and to Shi'ite refugees from the south of Iraq who had been forced to flee from the forces of Saddam Hussein.

Despite what the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) said about evidence of inefficiency—and I agree with at least some of what he said—I pay tribute to all the organisations over there—governmental and non-governmental—that are doing their very best to deal with difficult circumstances. I pay a special tribute to the Iranian Government and to the Iranian Red Crescent, because it is largely due to their efforts that what we observed was not nearly as bad as I had feared before I went.

I have visited refugee camps in other parts of the world with the Select Committee. For example, a few days ago I visited refugee camps on the Sudan-Ethiopia border where the smell of death permeated the atmosphere and where sick, starving and dying children were everywhere to be seen. By contrast, the children whom we saw in the camps in west Azerbaijan and Khuzestan looked, for the most part, healthy and in very good spirits. However, I do not want to underrate the horrific experience that those children and their parents must have undergone. It must have been an ordeal for them, first, to literally run for their lives from the killing machine of Saddam Hussein and then to be faced with the threat of death from starvation on freezing mountain tops.

When we visited the camps in late May the worst seemed to be over, at least for the time being. I emphasise the latter phrase. The reason why the worst seemed to be over at least for the time being was that the various aid agencies appeared to be getting to grips with the basic needs of the refugees. However, there is no room for complacency—there is much more to be done, bearing in mind that there are about 2·5 million refugees or displaced persons in that part of the world. Winter is approaching and, looking further ahead, we cannot and must not expect those people to live in refugee camps for ever. We must step up our efforts to find a permanent long-term solution, including a political settlement. That means trying our best to find a peaceful and democratic solution to the internal problems which still exist in Iraq and it also means going some way to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Kurdish people for a degree of self-determination or autonomy.

The Kurds were suffering atrocities at the hands of Saddam Hussein long before he invaded Kuwait and the Gulf war has, arguably, made things worse instead of better for them. We therefore have a duty to do everything possible to help them in their immediate plight and in the longer term.

I want to comment on the British contribution to the crisis. By 1 May this year, the Overseas Development Administration had committed a total of £61·5 million, but it is important to point out to the House that only £30 million of that is new money from the Treasury's central reserve. In other words, more than half that money comes from the existing, over-stretched ODA budget. If we take the new money—£30 million—and divide it by the 2·5 million people involved, it works out at the princely sum of £12 a head. It is not a huge amount when considered in those terms.

It is also worth considering that the ODA was charged by the Ministry of Defence for much of the relief operation carried out by the armed forces. I hope that the Minister will reply in his summing up to the Select Committee

recommendation that there should be a new arrangement between the ODA and the Ministry of Defence. I should prefer there to be no transfer payment from the aid budget to the defence budget, but if there is, it should take into account the training element for the armed forces in the refugee operations. That is an explicit recommendation in the Select Committee report.

According to the Government, the Gulf war cost them £2·5 billion. That is probably an underestimate, but the truth will come out at the end of the day. The total ODA commitment of £61·5 million to help Iraqi refugees alone is the equivalent of three Tornado aircraft. Perhaps that brings the matter into perspective. Why are the Government's spending priorities such that they spend so much on a destructive war that cost more than 100,000 lives and yet spend relatively little on trying to help the refugees who are the victims of the aftermath of that war?

I hope that, as a result of this debate, more priority will be given to helping not just Iraqi refugees, but the many others throughout the world who find themselves the innocent victims of disaster, whether it be famine, flood, earthquake or the ravages of war. For the sake of humanity, we owe help to those people, especially if we have been partly responsible for precipitating the action and thereby partly responsible for causing the desperate situation in which they find themselves.

6.42 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I shall be brief and truncate my remarks. I found the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) most interesting, although the latter's speech was too long. They addressed the central issue arising from the Gulf conflict of how we deal with the question of article 2.7 which deals with intervention in the internal affairs of nation states. When the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs examines the matter, it should do so from a wide perspective, and it should do a lot of work because it will be making a contribution to the international debate on the matter.

I refer to the implementation of resolution 688 by the United Nations, especially the section in paragraph 2, which deals with ending the repression. Mr. Talabani and his advisers told me and my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) in Istanbul only a week and a half ago that the Kurdish leadership had had no contact with the United Nations monitors in the field. It was we who had to advise them to make contact. Even when we asked Mrs. Ogata—the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—yesterday whether that contact had been made, she was unable to tell us. Only when that contact is made will evidence of repression be proven to the international community and especially to the Security Council of the United Nations. Only when that evidence has been proven and reported back can any rapid action force deployed in Incerlik in southern Turkey or elsewhere be used. It is the linkage between the reporting back by the United Nations monitors to the Security Council through Mr. Van de Stoehl, the former Dutch Foreign Minister, and the threat of action by the rapid action force based in southern Turkey which will force Saddam Hussein to realise that the major powers mean business in exercising resolution 688, which refers to the need to end repression.

The second part of resolution 688 which is important to the debate is the part that deals with the need—I think that the word "insist" is used—for the Iraqi regime to give access to the United Nations humanitarian effort wherever in Iraq it is required. Following our meeting with Mrs. Ogata in the House yesterday, it is my view that the resolution is not being implemented. The Iraqi Government are preventing access by United Nations personnel to various parts of Iraq. Furthermore, the United Nations has simply not put in place the number of people necessary to ensure adequate coverage of the whole of Iraq in providing humanitarian relief.

Significantly, whereas the United States was prepared, acting on the basis of paragraphs 12 and 13 of resolution 687 which deal with nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons technology, to issue the threat of foreign intervention if necessary to secure implementation of those paragraphs, to date it has not been prepared to threaten Iraq on the basis of that country's failure to permit access under paragraph 3 of resolution 688, which deals with the need for Iraq to allow passage to United Nations representatives for the purposes of humanitarian relief. I hope that my comments will be taken on board by Ministers because the debate will turn on both matters in the coming months.

A number of my hon. Friends asked why, at the end of the war, we did not proceed to block off Saddam Hussein's forces and, as many have argued, go as far as Baghdad. The answer is simple, and the British people should understand that answer. As politicians, as Ministers, or as representatives of the American Government, we all had to give undertakings on British television and in the rest of the British media that the war aims of the coalition were confined to getting Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. I remember the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs being interviewed on television and having to make the point that our war aims were restricted. He referred to the possibility of dealing with the matter in a later Select Committee report. I hope that he does not go further than his comments on British television only three months ago. He could not go further. The pressure did not come only from American public opinion, but in the House, when many of my hon. Friends—and, indeed, many Conservative Members—demanded that a restriction be placed on the war aims. Furthermore, we were conscious of the rioting in major capitals throughout the region, such as Cairo and Tangiers. There were objections even in Saudi Arabia to the way the war was going from some Shi'ite groups. In Pakistan and Iran, there were demonstrations in capital cities. There were demonstrations in Syria. People forget that we were circumscribed by international opinion. That is why we did not go further, and that is why we were correct not to go further. People should not change the debate now that the conflict is all but over—apart from these remaining matters.

Some argue that sanctions should be removed. In my view, they should not be removed; they should stay. It is the responsibility of the United Nations to resolve the problem of humanitarian relief inside Iraq. If the United Nations officers in the field feel that they do not have what Mrs. Ogata described yesterday as "the wherewithal" to deal with the problems, they must report back to the Security Council the needs of Iraq in terms of humanitarian relief. Those arguments should take place in the United Nations. It is not for western Governments unilaterally—or, indeed, for the United Nations—to end

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

sanctions. It is for western Governments, through their United Nations relief programmes, to intervene and provide whatever is required.

6.49 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am in a little difficulty, as I understood that the Front-Bench speakers wished to begin winding up the debate at 6.50 pm. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) shaking her head, so I shall continue quickly.

Other hon. Members have spoken about the future possibilities for a new international order. I hope that the day will come when we have that, but it will have to be a genuine new order, with all the nations in the United Nations, not, as we have now, an order dominated by the five permanent members of the Security Council. Some of us would have believed more readily in those countries' intentions concerning the Gulf war if we had not seen the important United Nations nations, at the behest of the United States, standing back and doing little about repression in Cambodia, Palestine and Nicaragua.

Paragraph 1 of the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs says that the resources to provide aid for Iraqi refugees are "severely stretched". Many of us wonder when the day will come when the nations of the world will spend on anything like the same scale to save lives as they have spent to kill people. The coalition forces spent £100 billion on the war, yet when the United Nations sought relief support for the refugee problem it managed to get only £58 million to help what it then thought would be about 400,000 refugees. In fact, by mid-April there were 400,000 refugees on the Turkish mountains and 400,000 more in Iraq near the Turkish border, 1 million in northern Iran and 70,000 in southern Iran—a total of 1,870,000. The aid was indeed thinly spread.

If I were to encourage people to rise up against their oppressors—for instance, by encouraging the Iraqis to rise up against Saddam Hussein—I should feel some responsibility if they took me at my word, and would have financed that uprising. People were cynically left to rise up and given practically no support. Then they were left in appalling conditions in the mountains.

It is not true that this Government came hastily to the refugees' aid. They did so only after the British people had seen the refugees' plight on their television screens and kept complaining about the Government's lack of response. The same thing happened when the American people saw the plight of the Kurdish refugees on television. Only then did western Governments start responding to the refugees' plight.

The huge responsibilities taken on by Iran in caring for the refugees both now and in past years put yesterday's Government statement about refugees coming into this country in a poor light. A paltry few hundred people are arriving here, yet the Government go to great lengths to resist their being allowed in. They say that those people should stop off at the first available safe country instead of heading here. What an ungenerous response in comparison with the responsibilities thrown on to the shoulders of Iraq's neighbouring countries.

The Government dithered during April and said that they were worried about intervening in the internal affairs of Iraq, although our forces had already bombed Iraq back into a pre-industrial age. People are still dying in their hundreds of thousands because of infected water, poor sanitation and lack of medicines. The Government's response was farcical.

I should be glad if in future people recognised that we have responsibilities to each other as human beings, and did not allow the barriers presented by nation states to stop us coming to people's aid promptly and fully, with a wholehearted response that recognised human need. I should be glad if, for once, we could start working towards a system in which we were willing to spend anything like the same amount of money on saving lives as we have all been spending on destroying lives.

6.54 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I was recently reminded of the words of David Lloyd George:

"the most persistent sound which reverberates through men's history is the beating of the war drums. This war, like the next war, is a war to end wars."

Those words came to mind as, making my way to Kuwait City with the Select Committee on Defence, I flew over the burning oil wells. Someone said then that if hell had a national park that would be it.

What have we gained from the war? What have been its costs? We have 1·8 million refugees, and we have created a political problem. As paragraph 15 of the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs says, it

"raises the grim prospect of a seemingly unending refugee operation of Palestinian proportions."

The Select Committee should be congratulated on giving us a short and cogent report on refugees and aid.

I have looked at the British Refugee Council's report of its visit to Iran at the beginning of June. Iran was commended for the way in which it has coped with the refugees. The report said that the number of refugees in Iran will exceed 1·3 million, and that in spite of any negotiations between Saddam Hussein and the Kurds 40 per cent. of them will stay behind. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) said, it bodes ill when we compare our own treatment of refugees with the way in which Iran has treated the 1·3 million refugees who have come to its borders. The report estimates that 400,000 to 600,000 Shi'ites have been displaced in the southern parts of Iraq.

The Harvard team of medics referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has estimated some of the costs of the war. It gives chapter and verse on mortality and morbidity, but the factor that stands out is that 170,000 Iraqi children under the age of five will die in the next year if we do not do anything. To those who say that we should not lift sanctions I say, "Think of one of those 170,000 children as being your own son, your own daughter or your own niece or nephew". Could those people then stand up and say that we should not lift sanctions? The team of medics tells us that those children will have a slow and painful death because of the stone age conditions that now exist in Iraq. Those conditions exist because the coalition forces ensured that they would.

We spent £100 billion prosecuting the war, yet to date we have spent only slightly more than £60 million on prosecuting the peace—less than 1 per cent. of the amount spent on the war. That is not good enough. The humanitarian aid has been welcomed by Iran and the Kurds, and the human effects of the Gulf war are now

being ameliorated by international aid, but that does not erase the effects already suffered. In many respects the immediate aftermath of the war has improved very little in the intervening four months. In terms of malnutrition and disease control the situation has deteriorated further.

From a humanitarian point of view, I plead with the Minister to lift sanctions, in the name of humanity if for no other reason. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) explained how Saddam Hussein had been created, and that should be the lesson of the war. What will happen next—we have seen it already, with more arms sales to the middle east—is that we will get another Saddam. There will be Saddam 2 and Saddam 3. The only way to cut his legs off will be to prosecute another $100 billion war, and deliver 2 million more refugees. It is not worth it.

We see the kernel of the problem when we consider the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the supply of arms to the middle east. That is where the solution should lie. I look forward to the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on the issue of arms control measures. We are reminded in the 20 May issue of *The House magazine* that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council supplied middle eastern nations with $163,200 million worth of material during the four years preceding the arms embargo against Iraq. Baghdad received the largest proportion of that—$52,800,000. Sadly, Saddam Hussein is our creature because we supplied him with those arms.

The lesson of the war is that we should immediately convene a middle east peace conference encompassing all the issues, so that we do not find ourselves faced with a Saddam 2 or a Saddam 3 and 2 million more refugees.

7 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), I am in favour of the lifting of sanctions forthwith.

A fortnight ago I shared a platform with the actress Vanessa Redgrave who had just come back from Iraq. Her report, which I believe was factually accurate, was along similar lines to the Harvard report, from which I must quote:

"The study team gained the first unsupervised access to Iraq's electrical power plants and finds that Iraq today generates only about 20 per cent. as much electricity as before the Gulf War."

The Harvard doctors write:

"There is a link in Iraq between electrical power and public health . . . Without electricity, water cannot be purified, sewage cannot be treated, water-borne diseases flourish, and hospitals cannot treat curable illness."

One of the study team's findings, which has been repeated today, was that at least 170,000 under-fives will die this year. The team also found that water purification, sewage disposal and electrical power plants have been incapacitated. Without imported parts one cannot run generators, and without generators there will be no electricity to deal with sewage and water purification.

I realise that there are problems in lifting sanctions. I refer the Government to *Aviation Week and Space Technology* of 1 July, which states:

"Estimates were received that 6 million Iraqis could have died from dispersion of stored anthrax and botulism viruses."

Can the Minister comment on the leaking of chemicals stored at the Muthanna military complex near Samarra? They may have been badly stored, but apparently they may well be leaking as a result of bombing and poor maintenance.

What do the Government propose to do about the recommendations of the United Nations inspection team, led by the Australian, Dr. Peter Dunn?

As I said, I realise that there are difficulties in connection with lifting sanctions. What is the latest information about the nuclear issue, for example, and what were the results of the presentation of classified spy satellite photographs to the United Nations Security Council? Did the Iraqis remove nuclear equipment from Abu Ghurab, north of Baghdad, last Monday? Were the inspectors denied access, and what do Ministers propose to do about their statement that

"activities which had been observed from a distance during a first visit had ceased and objects that had been seen had been removed"?

I admit that that is part of the difficulty in lifting sanctions but—but, but, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton says, in humantarian terms, the public health catastrophe that is upon us simply does not bear thinking about.

7.3 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I welcome the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, although I thought that some Conservative Members who spoke in its favour showed considerable complacency, especially about the role of the Overseas Development Administration.

On 1 April or thereabouts, we saw on our television screens the desperate situation facing the Kurds, yet even by the end of April very little had been done despite the considerable public response and their desire to assist.

Throughout April, masses of Kurds starved, froze and died. It was evident that a huge airlift of aid should have been the first priority. The policy of safe havens made sense only if those to be defended could also survive the elements. Organisations such as the Red Cross, Oxfam and the Save The Children Fund did valiant work, given the limits of their resources, and the disaster unit of the ODA, starved of adequate funding and full logistical back up, worked beyond the call of duty.

Why did not the Cabinet provide the resources needed for Britain to set in motion an equivalent to the Berlin airlift? For weeks, people throughout the country had been collecting blankets, groundsheets, medicines, clothing and so on. The medical goods were sent on the basis of information supplied by the Iranian embassy about the materials required. The public will be aghast to discover that much of the material was not dispatched until more than a month later.

It is not true that the ODA sent massive assistance to Iran. To 28 April, only four 707s, carrying about 35 tonnes each, went to Iran. That is disgraceful. Later, there was a build-up in the number of aircraft sent, so it looked as though a reasonable number of them had gone, but at the time when it was needed the material was simply not being sent in in anything like the amounts that Conservative Members suggested.

Bodies emerged in Britain such as British Aid for the Kurds, which had collected huge quantities of material and had access to much-needed supplies from numerous firms. Private truckers such as Track 29 moved their goods

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

free of charge, and Iran Air sent in high-capacity 747s to collect the supplies. The 747s can carry up to 100 tonnes, unlike the 707s used by the ODA.

With the best will in the world, and after superhuman effort, bodies such as British Aid for the Kurds were still left with masses of materials on their hands, which presented warehousing problems, while they desperately searched for more flight opportunities. All that the ODA could do was respond ad hoc, paying for the odd movement or the storage of goods. It was at Cabinet and prime ministerial level that the decision needed to be taken to overcome the logjam and to ensure that the goods were shifted more quickly than Iran Air could shift them on its own. Throughout April, Iran Air was even paying landing charges at Heathrow airport. Only later were some landing charges lifted, but only for special flights coming to Britain —even though standard Iran Air flights were taking out full loads of material.

I hope that, in producing its next report, the Foreign Affairs Committee will examine what happened in respect of the movement of goods. Bodies such as British Aid to the Kurds collected much-needed material—not the material rubbished by the ODA, referred to in the report. Those bodies did invaluable work, and the British public made a great response. Long before a concert was held to raise money, and long before others—who also did invaluable work—began to move in on the act, ordinary people throughout the country had collected valuable material.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although the British public's generosity in giving goods was tremendous, in times of disaster relief, it is more practical to give money? The same goods could have been purchased in Teheran. In fact, three times as much could have been purchased for the value of the goods that were piling up at London airport. It would be in everybody's interests to encourage people to give money and not goods in any future disaster.

Mr. Barnes: The successor organisation to British Aid for the Kurds is now trying to help in the Horn of Africa and it is collecting money because of the difficulties of shifting the appropriate material. If the ODA could handle the situation properly and could draw on what has been collected in this country, that would be of benefit. After exchange rates and foreign markets are taken into account, the subsequent sum is often less than the amount that was originally collected.

We should not decry the important work carried out by various organisations to send much-needed material to Iraq. People saw the disaster on their television screens and they knew what materials were likely to be required. They collected that valuable material and the ODA should have been able to distribute it. Organisations like British Aid for the Kurds should not be written out of the record.

British Aid for the Kurds is a successor to Parcels for the Troops in the Gulf. When it organised those parcels, they were sent out very easily because the Ministry of Defence was sending planes and provisions to the area. The parcels were well packed, and they were sent off easily. The woman who organised those two groups, Lorraine Goodrich, has received her reward from Buckingham palace in connection with her work for Parcels for the British Troops in the Gulf. However, her assistance for the Kurds is written out of the record by the ODA. I hope that British Aid for the Kurds will not be written out of the record when the Foreign Affairs Committee considers these matters further.

7.11 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The House will agree that few citizens have greater cause to fear their Government than do the Kurds have reason to fear and loathe Saddam Hussein. His policy towards that part of Iraq has been marked by murder, betrayal and a brutal disregard for the obligations that a Government owe to their citizens. Those essential facts explain the chaotic and distressing flight to the mountains that we witnessed earlier this year and which, following the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, led to the massive relief operation and the creation of safe havens that have been the focus of this debate.

I was in Luxembourg on 8 April when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister launched his initiative. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) was right to emphasise that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, by his action and the policies that were pursued thereafter, made a decisive and imaginative contribution to the relief of suffering in that part of Iraq.

This debate was opened eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. Many of the facts and considerations that are relevant to this debate can be found in the admirably succinct report that was published two days ago. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development very much regrets not being able to be present here today. She will make a full, written report to that document later this year. For that reason, I hope that I will be forgiven if I do not deal in over-great detail with some of the specific recommendations in the Select Committee's report.

In responding to the debate, I want to reply to particular points made by right hon. and hon. Members, to explain what we have tried to do in Iraq, in particular in north Iraq, to assess the current position in that country and to give the House my view on how policy is likely to unfold.

The Select Committee's report emphasises the scale of the crisis that confronted the world in March and April of this year. On 10 April, as is stated in the report, there were more than 400,000 refugees camped in the mountains of Turkey. There were about 400,000 refugees in Iraq close to the Turkish border. There were about 1 million in northern Iran and about 70,000 in southern Iran. That was indeed a people in flight. It was a tragedy on a scale that is seldom seen. Since then, as the House is aware, the position has improved substantially—at least in north Iraq.

All the refugees on the mountains within the allied controlled zone have returned to Iraq. The mountain refugee camps are closed and the transit stations are almost deserted. The towns of Zakho and Dahuk, together with most other towns and villages, are returning to normal. To be more precise, the latest information suggests that of the original 1·8 million refugees who left

Iraq for Turkey and Iran, 1 million have now returned to their homes with the rest dispersed in camps and United Nations' humanitarian centres.

The relief operations in the north-east are being led by the International Committee of the Red Cross and by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The United Nations has established humanitarian centres in Arbil and Sulaymaniyah with sub-offices reporting to it. The ICRC is presently distributing food to 750,000 refugees.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) made an important point about winter shelters. From information that I have been given, I think that sufficient winter shelters are still available in Iraq. That should be sufficient for the kind of problem that my right hon. Friend had in mind. Most certainly in view of what he said, I propose to raise the matter further with the ODA and, if necessary, it will be raised with the United Nations' authorities and agencies.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I am glad to hear about the winter shelters, but I am very concerned about the Shias in southern Iraq. The safety of the just under 1 million Shias there must be at the heart of our thinking in this debate. In particular, we must be concerned about the safety of Grand Ayatollah Abul Kassem Al Khoei, who is the leader of about 250 million Shias around the world. Will my hon. and learned Friend the Minister ensure that the Government do all they can, albeit from a distance, to ensure the safety of those people in the same way that we are caring for others?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the position in south Iraq. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford and many other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), also referred to that. The position in south Iraq is extremely worrying. Early reports that up to 500,000 people are sheltering in the marshes are probably wrong, but there are many people there—perhaps between 30,000 and 100,000.

We have warned the Iraqi Government that repression against those people would lead to the direst consequences. We need to know more about what is happening in south Iraq and we, therefore, greatly welcome the fact that Prince Sadruddin is leading a high-level United Nations' team to Iraq to make an in-depth study of need. That report will be of the greatest value to us. It is essential that we know more about what is happening in south Iraq. I agree with the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford and others that the refugee problem in Iraq is not at an end.

The Select Committee's report states that the quality of the United Kingdom's response to the crisis has been good. That conclusion was affirmed by hon. Members who have personal experience of that part of the world as a result of their visit there. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) made some ungenerous remarks about aid. I suggest that a little more——

Mr. Harry Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Hogg: No, I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Barnes: Why not?

Mr. Hogg: Because I am not going to. If the hon. Gentleman studies paragraph 21 of the report more carefully, he may see how unfair and ungenerous his observations were.

I very much agree with the Select Committee's conclusion that the quality of the United Kingdom's response was good. I pay tribute to all those whose efforts contributed to that result, including the armed forces, the many and various non-governmental organisations, the voluntary groups and the carer teams of volunteers. They all performed vital tasks, providing security; establishing a food distribution system; building shelters and giving health care—in short, reducing suffering and saving lives. I also agree with the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, which was echoed by Opposition Members, that the work of the Iranian authorities was prompt, full and admirable.

Britain's financial contribution was prompt and generous. We are the largest single donor to the ICRC Gulf appeal. We have contributed 14 million Swiss francs to that appeal and $16 million to the United Nations' appeal. Since last August we have contributed £81 million to relief in the area, over £61 million of which has been contributed since 4 April. All of that has been done at the same time as playing our part in providing aid to Bangladesh and to alleviating the crisis in Africa.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford made some kind remarks about the functioning of the ODA, but also said—I accept this—that the ODA was placed under considerable strain during that process. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has authorised a review of the handling of disasters and of how we can improve the systems within the ODA. We shall focus on three issues. First, during the crisis we found that the dispatch of assessors and co-ordinators was of great value, so we shall see how we can build on that. Secondly, we need to maintain a store and inventory of basic supplies that can be rapidly dispatched. Thirdly, we need to be able to build on the contribution made by volunteers. All those areas will be the subject of the review.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford rightly referred to the United Nations. As is stated in his report, my right hon. Friend said that the crisis showed the need to improve the systems in the United Nations. We have two things in mind. The first is to appoint a senior figure who will report directly to the Secretary-General, direct all relief efforts in the United Nations and co-ordinate the efforts of agencies and Governments. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and others have referred to the somewhat unco-ordinated response of agencies and Governments. That response needs to be co-ordinated. We need a register of all the relevant NGOs and agencies, together with the resources that are available to them.

I should now like to turn to the future. Operation Haven has achieved its aim of meeting the immediate humanitarian need of the refugees who were originally on the Iraqi-Turkish border; for the most part, they have returned to their homes. We have already withdrawn some forces whose task is now complete. We do not wish those forces which remain to be there longer than necessary. We have always been clear that the deployment was temporary, but it would be pointless to withdraw forces only to have them return in future. We, therefore, wish to see credible measures in place designed to prevent the

[Mr. Hogg]

repetition of the events of March. That point was emphasised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford and is the first recommendation in his Committee's report. Those measures were set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the House on 25 June.

First, we wish to see an effective United Nations presence on the ground. In addition to its humanitarian personnel, the UN has now deployed 234 security guards in Iraq. The UN is confident that some 500 will be in place by the end of July. Their role is to protect UN personnel, assets and operations. They will also monitor the security situation in Iraq and report any incidents to the Secretary-General. It would then be for the Security Council to decide what action to take.

Secondly, Iraq will be clearly warned that any renewed repression will meet the severest response. The Iraqi Government should be in no doubt about our resolve to prevent a repetition of the events of March.

Thirdly, in order to give weight to those warnings, we believe that there should be a continuing deterrent military presence in the area. We are discussing with our allies exactly what form that presence might take, but we see it as a multinational force ready to respond quickly to violations.

Fourthly, we will maintain sanctions against Iraq. Iraq's behaviour over the past days has shown once again that the international community must maintain the pressure on the regime in Baghdad in order to make it comply with its international obligations and implement resolution 687.

I very much agree with the spirit of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Workington about sanctions. I entirely agree with his explanation about why we could not go further into Iraq. We gave undertakings to the public and to the House that our purpose was limited by the Security Council and that we were operating precisely within the terms of the resolution. Moreover, we could not have held the Arab members of the coalition together if we had gone beyond those repeated public commitments. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for so clearly and precisely stating those facts.

We have not taken a final decision on the withdrawal of forces, but we are working to ensure that the elements that I have outlined are largely in place before withdrawal takes place. I am grateful for the support that I have received from hon. Members tonight.

We are also following closely the talks which have been taking place between Baghdad and the Kurdish leadership. I regret that no agreement has yet been concluded, but it must be for the Kurdish leadership to decide if and when the terms reached with Baghdad are acceptable. What we have said for our part is that we are sure that the international community will be prepared to look at any agreement that is reached to see what might be done to underpin it.

I should now like to answer some of the points that have been raised. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to the supply of spare parts for electricity generation. He was good enough to mention that he had an engagement that would oblige him to leave earlier than he wished. The Iraqis have established about 25 per cent. of their capacity. Provision is made for the import of essential humanitarian supplies, which is covered by article 20 of resolution 687. If the Iraqis wish to import such parts, they can notify the sanctions committee and consideration will then be given to their request. The no-objection procedure agreed by the sanctions committee in March provides for the importation of some equipment, namely, water purification equipment, small generators suitable for hospitals and pumping stations, fuel for those small generators and spare parts for the pumping stations. Therefore, the United Nations has already put in place a range of measures that go some way towards meeting the hon. Gentleman's point.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley, supported by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), raised the important question of Ministry of Defence charges, which also appears in the Select Committee's report. Charges were last reviewed in 1990, when it was agreed that they should be raised only on additional expenditure arising from deployment, for example, supplies or foreign service pay allowances. I see the attraction of their argument and we are bound to review the matter again in the light of what has been said in this debate and in the Select Committee's report.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Minister saying that he will review that matter? When I raised it in the debate on the Navy recently, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement said that it was currently the subject of discussion. Is that not the case?

Mr. Hogg: I am not aware of that. I thought that it was prospective rather than actual. I am grateful for the correction and if I am wrong, I apologise. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman so that there is no room for error.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale made an interesting point about a standing United Nations force. His remarks implied that a standing United Nations force would have powers not only to act under the authority of the permanent five but also to intervene in the internal affairs of a nation. It is an interesting concept, which is bound to be discussed from time to time, but I would be cautious about it for two reasons. First, there are substantial problems in adjusting the charter. The charter would have to be adjusted to give the Security Council the authority to act as the right hon. Gentleman suggested. Secondly, the deep-seated prejudices of permanent members of the Security Council would have to be adjusted. Those nations include China as regards Tibet, and the Soviet Union as regards the constituent republics. One cannot overlook those factors.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not this the right time to start those discussions? Although the Minister expresses reservations about the suggestion, should not the British Government take a lead in that area, especially as the Select Committee is about to report on those matters?

Mr. Hogg: Let us await the Select Committee's report. I see problems arising from an adjustment to the charter which might not benefit this country.

The coalition forces achieved what they set out to achieve, namely, the relief of suffering and the creation of conditions that have encouraged most of the refugees who fled to the mountains to return to their homes in Iraq. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister played an historic

part in the introduction and shaping of policies that produced the results that I have just described. Although the coalition forces do not intend to stay in northern Iraq, we shall have a substantial military presence in the region. As Saddam Hussein will know full well from what has already happened, if he fails to comply with any warnings that he may receive, he exposes his force to the risk of vigorous and prompt military action. Our determination has already been tested. Coalition forces have shown a resolution, capacity and readiness to act. As a consequence, Iraqi armies in Kuwait were totally defeated. Saddam and his generals should learn from that experience.

7.35 pm

Mr. David Howell: With the leave of the House, I thank hon. Members and my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for the way in which they have received the Committee's report and for the sensible guidance that they have given the Committee for its future work. We shall try to respond as effectively as we can. The debate has been brief but effective, and has helped to begin to reveal some of the monstrous legacies of Saddam Hussein. Those legacies will continue as long as he remains in Baghdad and continues his policy of killing and persecution.

As the House has recognised, there are millions of refugees not only in Iraq but swirling round the middle east, living in misery and fear due to the actions of Saddam Hussein. How we help those refugees and satisfy humanitarian aims, particularly in Iraq, without helping him to commit more monstrosities and evils, and how we combine the need to keep sanctions on him to bring him to heel while at the same time helping those to whom he has caused so much suffering, are dilemmas that face the House and the policy makers. We may not yet have solved them, but we seek to do so.

In the meantime, the House will be heartened by my hon. and learned Friend's firm resolve that the coalition forces will remain in place until and unless an effective UN force is developed. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) reminded us so graphically, winter lies ahead for those suffering people, and action will be needed on the aid and relief front.

I am grateful to the House for responding to the Committee's suggestion that the ODA, which has done extremely well, nevertheless needs to increase the speed and effectiveness of its high quality aid efforts. We also suggested that the role of the UN agencies needs to be rethought, and it is good to hear the proposal that a co-ordinator is now being seriously considered by Ministers here and overseas. I hope that the proposal will come into effect within the next few weeks.

The hon. Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) and many others mentioned the fascinating question of when, in the new post-cold-war world, we can expect the UN and its agencies to intervene. How do they override reluctant host Governments when appalling humanitarian tragedies are taking place? Today, the UN is in Iraq in a way that many people thought it would never be. Our coalition forces were also dragged in. Tomorrow, it may be the Balkans—who knows? Those matters are for future debates and deliberations in Committee, and I am grateful to the House for paying attention to our report.

The debate was concluded, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).

Unemployment

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the Employment Committee of Session 1990-91 on Future Prospects for Levels of Employment and Unemployment, House of Commons Paper No. 228 and European Community Documents Nos. 8369/89 and 8416/90 on mutual recognition of professional education and training and No. 9387/90 on employment in Europe.]

Class VI, Vote 1

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further sum, not exceeding £1,150,731,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £90,392,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Employment, including expenditure via Training and Enterprise Councils, on training, including the provision of training programmes for young people and adults and initiatives within education; on the promotion of enterprise and the encouragement of self-employment and small firms; on help for unemployed people; the improvement of industrial relations; industrial tribunals; compensation for persons disabled by certain industrial diseases; payments towards expenses of trade union ballots; on residual liabilities and disposal of the remaining assets of the former National Dock Labour Board; on the costs of maintaining and disposing of the former Skills Training Agency; administration, central and miscellaneous services including assistance on employment issues to eastern Europe in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—*[Mr. Jackson.]*

7.38 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The Select Commmittee on Employment wanted to study the prospect of employment and unemployment in the United Kingdom. Although the Government make assumptions about future levels of unemployment for planning public expenditure, they always decline to make a public forecast. Therefore, the Committee decided, according to the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Trades Union Congress, to give evidence on their forecast for future levels of employment and unemployment, the causes of the present situation and the factors that will affect future levels.

We published the report for the information of the House and to give the House the opportunity to debate a matter of the utmost importance. I intend to introduce the subject, to cite some of the evidence given to us and then to comment on it. Doubtless other members of the Select Committee will do the same.

Large-scale unemployment represents a failure of policy and of performance. It is not just a waste of resources; every statistic of involuntary idleness is a personal tragedy. Some people can overcome redundancy, but others trapped in long-term unemployment remain stuck in grief, prolonged distress and despair and cannot find an alternative meaning or purpose in life. That in turn leads to ill health and family breakdown.

Anyone who doubts the grief involved in losing a job might care to read the moving interview in *Vanity Fair* given by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were originally reluctant to use the "R" word. They said that there would be no recession, and when it came they said that it would be short and shallow. Since then they have consistently said that good times—and "vague stirrings"—are just around the corner. In March this year we took evidence from the CBI and the Institute of Directors, who told us about the depth, the seriousness and the pain of the recession. The memorandum from the CBI said:

"Since the middle of last year, output has tumbled across the economy, falling most sharply in manufacturing, as orders have dried up."

The CBI also told us that its survey suggested that retailers, wholesalers and financial services will, if current trends continue, also shed labour. It told us that because of improvements in productivity disappearing employers had to contain labour costs by shedding staff.

In answer to a question the CBI said:

"In manufacturing . . . business optimism is at its lowest for nearly 10 years"

and companies have been responding to more difficult circumstances by cutting back on employment for more than a year. By contrast, the CBI told us that there are no signs of an outright recession in the European economy —it is in this country that the disaster is occurring.

The memorandum from the Institute of Directors stated, without beating about the bush:

"Since 1984 IOD has done its own bi-monthly survey of member opinion, including asking members what their expectations are about economic developments. The February 1991 results are the worst in the life of the survey."

Why has this disaster occurred? Who is responsible for it? Mr. Morgan of the IOD, a blunt speaker, said:

"In the last four years we have had a failure of economic management."

We shall see later in the debate whether Treasury Ministers express their regret for all this and apologise to the unemployed who are paying for Ministers' failures and mistakes—or whether they repeat that mass unemployment is a price well worth paying. The CBI told us that unemployment would continue to rise this year and next. The recession is going to get far worse in the foreseeable future, certainly until the next election—

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock) *rose—*

Mr. Leighton: The hon. Gentleman has a bad habit of interrupting my speeches after one or two sentences. This is a short debate and I intend to adopt a self-denying ordinance so that I do not hog too much time. I shall therefore not give way.

Both the TUC and the CBI said that unemployment would reach at least 2·25 million this year. The TUC said that more pessimistic forecasts predicted that it would rise to 3 million in 1992-93. Since we took that evidence, unemployment has exploded even more devastatingly. It has already reached 2·25 million, although we are only half way through the year. In the six months to November 1990 the average increase in unemployment was 25,400 per month. In the past six months it has averaged 80,200 per month. Unemployment has increased for 14 consecutive months and the trend is accelerating and is set to continue.

Not only does this cause a huge pool of human misery, but recession is expensive for the public finances. The Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service has estimated that each additional 100,000 unemployed people cost the Exchequer a further £300 million in benefit payments—and that does not include the taxes forgone. It is no wonder that the Government's books do not balance and they are being forced to borrow billions of pounds this year and even more next year.

Unemployment is a lagging indicator; it is a considerable time after the economy picks up before employment improves. So when will the recession end? The Government have been claiming to see vague stirrings. They claimed that there would be a recovery in the second half of this year, but we are already in July and it is not happening. The CBI and the IOD pointed out that not only manufacturing suffers; so do clerical jobs, advertising, retailing and financial services. Only this week we learnt that disastrous conditions in the high street forced the Burton group to close 100 shops and sack 1,600 staff after making losses that will amount to £177 million in the year to August. The number of companies that have collapsed in the first half of this year has risen by 66 per cent.

The IOD told us that the housing market is important. The total number of people living in homes on whose payments they are in arrears is now just under two million —equivalent to a population double the size of Birmingham's. The number of households more than six months in arrears rose from 87,360 in March 1990 to 209,620 in March of this year—it doubled. Property repossessions are outstripping the number of homes being built to meet social needs—primarily homelessness.

My conclusion is that there is little comfort in prospect in the medium term. As the recession is strong in the service industries, London and the south-east are in its grip and are bearing the brunt. In London there are more than 26 people chasing every notified vacancy, unemployment in London was more than 50 per cent. higher in April this year than it was a year before, and the rate of corporate bankruptcies has tripled. The *Evening Standard* Investors in Industry survey for April 1991 found that 94 per cent. of companies in the capital are likely to reduce or at best maintain their work force in the coming year. The outlook is bleak and many people will suffer.

The Committee looked into the exchange rate mechanism——

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Leighton: We asked each of the witnesses their estimate of the effects on employment of entry into the ERM. We were astonished that none of them had made such an estimate. There was a time when full employment was a national aim and when policies would be evaluated, among other things, for their effect on it. No more, apparently. One TUC witness said that the TUC did not have a forecast of the impact of entry on employment. Later he said:

"What impact ERM will have on the economy I am afraid I do not know."

Many might find it surprising that, despite that, the TUC was all in favour of entry, although it believed that we joined at the wrong rate—we should have joined at DM2·70 instead of DM2·95.

Neither the CBI nor the IOD had calculated the effects of entry on employment. Although the IOD had not been in favour of entry, however, it had studied its baneful effects on Ireland and France. Our report states:

"We believe that the full implications on employment levels of joining the ERM were not sufficiently discussed or understood before entry, and even now are not widely recognised."

The Department of Employment does not make estimates of the effects of ERM either, but we asked the Department whether it had made any studies of ERM's effect on France and Italy. We received a letter from the Secretary of State in which he quoted a memorandum from the director general of the National Economic Development Council and the November 1990 issue of the *National Institute Economic Review*. That was worrying because it told us that ERM membership had cost France 700,000 jobs and Italy a million jobs.

The March issue of *CBI News* included an article by Professor Douglas McWilliams, the CBI's chief economic adviser. Speaking of the effect on the French economy, he said:

"How has the French economy performed since the start of serious EMF membership of 1983? The initial effect was slow growth. French GNP rose by below trend for five consecutive years from 1983-87 with a cumulative shortfall of 4·5 per cent. of growth compared with productive potential. The main feature of this recession was that output was depressed for an unusually long period".

The article went on to say that wages were reduced. It continued:

"Nevertheless, reducing inflation still required rather slow growth associated with rising unemployment"

a rise in the number of jobs lost of approximately half a million. His last paragraph is extremely revealing and worrying. He says that

"the French experience suggests that if British membership of the ERM is successful in reducing inflation it is likely that unemployment will rise to about 500,000 above its 1990 level at some time before 1994. And if Britain is unsuccessful the rise in unemployment could be substantially more than this —perhaps as many as a million or more."

If the French experience is anything to go by, membership of the ERM could add an extra million to the dole queue, unemployment could be very much higher over the period of the next Parliament and economic growth would be slower. That is worrying because the parties seek to finance their programmes from economic growth.

After speaking about the DTI's 1992 awareness campaign, Mr. Morgan of the IOD said:

"The ERM situation poses a bigger problem than 1992 did, in terms of adjustments required and the awareness required."

Why have we not had an explanation or a debate about the matter. On the day when we interviewed the CBI, on 13 March, an article in the *Financial Times* said that ERM entry meant that we had

"to change our whole way of life."

If that is to happen, there should be an explanation. Commenting on the French experience the CBI said:

"The French economy has been slow in responding to the discipline that ERM membership brought to French firms."

Can we be any quicker, and what exactly is it that we have to do?

The normal way for divergent economies to adjust to each other is by changes in their exchange rates. If that is ruled out by the ERM, the IOD told us that if Britain's inflation was higher our competitive position would deteriorate from the day after we joined. It said that British companies

"had to start at high speed to make up for any lack of investment, and any lack of training and skill, if they are to control their unit labour costs, and stay competitive in the traded sector".

Tying the pound to the deutschmark means that Germany is the benchmark country. If our inflation is higher than that of Germany, as it is, if our productivity is lower, as it is, if our costs rise faster, as they do, we lose competitiveness from day one and cause higher unemployment. To survive we would need, at double quick speed, German levels of inflation, investment, productivity and unit costs.

[Mr. Leighton]

What is happening in the real world? Everyone says that investment, the seed corn, is vital, but investment is in reverse. In his Budget statement the Chancellor said that investment across the whole economy would fall by 10 per cent. In the key manufacturing centre it fell 20 per cent. between the first quarter of 1990 and the first quarter of 1991. All our witnesses said that productivity was the crucial deciding factor—but it is in reverse. The Department of Employment figures show that output per head in March was 1·9 per cent., nearly 2 percentage points down on the previous year and the largest decline since 1981. While we were going backwards, German productivity rose by 4·5 per cent. in the same period.

What about wage costs? The June issue of the *Employment Gazette* reported that wages and salaries in the three months to March 1991 were 11 per cent. higher than in the same period last year. Average earnings in manufacturing during the same period were 9 per cent. higher than last year. It is fair enough to have a rise of 9 per cent. when productivity is rising by the same percentage, but it went down by 2 per cent. That means a unit wage cost rise of 11 per cent. How does that compare with our competitors? The CBI told us:

"Our unit labour costs at the moment are going up . . . probably twice as fast as the best of our European competitors. That is not sustainable."

Not sustainable means that British firms lose market share, factories close down, more workers are thrown on the dole, and Britain is blighted and becomes a depressed area with chronic mass unemployment. It also means that the pound cannot be maintained at DM2·95. The high interest rates required by the vain attempt to keep it there further reinforce the recession and push investment and productivity into a downward spiral. Pressure on the pound then leads to a sterling crisis which blows the pound out of its unrealistic ERM parity—but only after great damage has been caused to British industry.

A successful ERM would mean some sort of speedy structural revolution in the British labour market, a major change in the behaviour of wage bargainers. It would also mean a cut in the real wages of British workers. According to the TUC spokesman, that is unlikely because he said that that would be,

"unrealistic, not to say immoral."

The pattern in Britian is for wages to shadow and compensate for the previous year's inflation. To be competitive in the ERM, however, wages would have to be linked to German—not British—inflation. That means that the real wages of British workers would have to come down. Do they know that? Have they been told? Do they agree? The future is likely to contain a great deal of industrial conflict as the attempt is made to force British wages down. We shall see many more incidents such as that at Rolls-Royce with employers unilaterally seeking to enforce a pay freeze.

What sort of lead are British workers receiving? I asked the IOD whether it thought that the spirit on a ship was the responsibility of those on the upper deck and it said yes. I asked whether it thought that directors should set an example and again it said yes. What kind of example is being set by those at the top? We are currently witnessing a wave of blatant corporate greed with those at the top agreeing to pay each other in telephone numbers with increases of 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 or more per cent. —one of them even gave himself a rise of 160 per cent. Those who run the privatised monopolies are leading the way.

This week we heard about Robert Evans, the chairman of British Gas. He is not content with a 66 per cent. pay increase because in his £500,000 four-bathroom house he has had installed £28,000 worth of gas fittings, showers, dishwashers, gas fires, kitchen appliances and gas street lights, and all for free. Apparently he is testing them. Everyone would like to conduct tests like that. What is sauce for the plutocratic goose must be sauce for the low-paid gander. If the captains of industry can help themselves and fill their pockets with gold, how can they argue that their foot soldiers should take pay cuts? It is likely that those at the bottom will want to take their lead from those at the top.

It is plain that the baneful effect of the ERM is to deepen and lengthen the recession. All the domestic arguments and the requirements of our economy cry out for a cut in interest rates and all our witnesses asked for that. The Institute of Directors wanted a 4 per cent. cut this year. However, membership of the ERM means that interest rates can no longer be used for the benefit of the domestic economy. As the Chancellor said, the overriding purpose of interest rates is to secure the pound in its ERM band. That means that interest rates stay higher than would otherwise be the case, the recession is deepened and prolonged and the unemployed pay the price.

Since we joined the ERM in October, unemployment has risen by well over 600,000. Fixed parities can work only if economic convergence comes first. A strong currency is the reward for economic success and performance. That cannot be achieved by fiat or passing a resolution.

The Institute of Directors drew our attention to monetary union and the introduction of a single currency before convergence in Germany. That led to the shutdown of the east German economy and the creation of mass unemployment. The same pressure, in a more modified form, would operate here.

All the witnesses agreed that skills and training were the key to success. The CBI said:

"We cannot get away from the fact that the UK produces fewer 16 year old school leavers with sensible qualifications, we keep fewer of our school children on beyond the age of 16 than most of our industrial competitors, we produce fewer engineers and vocationally qualified people at graduate level than most of our competitor nations. It is that sort of skills revolution which we have to make work this time before we try anything else."

The Institute of Directors likewise said that it

"believed that skills and training are the key factors in determining prosperity."

The nation has to invest in its human capital. There is no representative body at national level to set targets for vocational qualifications and to oversee and monitor progress in their implementation. Here, the Committee makes a major recommendation. We believe that, in consultation with the training and enterprise councils, the local enterprise companies in Scotland, and other relevant bodies, the Government of the day should set national targets for improvements in levels of skill and qualifications. We hope that the Government will accept that recommendation and that responsibility on behalf of the nation.

I thank hon. Members for listening so patiently and I commend our report to the House.

8.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I hesitate to follow the economic guru, the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), in the more arcane arguments on the economic basis of the present situation, because I do not have anything like his expertise in the subject. However, when he claimed that we were looking for a change in our way of life, I could not help feeling, as he piled gloom on gloom, that we were listening to an east London way of death. I thought that he claimed that there was no serious recession on the continent. Whether that is true or not, a number of countries on the mainland of Europe have unemployment rates that are not only a great deal higher than ours but have remained consistently higher over a number of years. France is a notable example.

When we are talking about new ways to change our attitudes, it is encouraging to hear such a spirited defence of keeping wages and inflation under control. I will leave it to those of my hon. Friends who I know wish to follow me in the debate, and who are better qualified than I to do so, to explore further the likely impact of the proposals for a minimum wage linked to the average wage. That fits uneasily with the hon. Gentleman's argument that we should keep wages under strict control.

I thought that I heard the hon. Gentleman say that the Institute of Directors was looking for a 4 per cent. reduction in interest rates in a year. It is still July, and since October our interest rates have come down by 3·5 per cent., so I am not discouraged.

Mr. Leighton: That includes last year.

Mr. Rowe: The hon. Gentleman is correcting me. Apparently the Institute of Directors wants interest rates to come down by 4 per cent. this year. I view with some reserve this headlong rush to cut interest rates—a policy which I know is much beloved by Labour Members. Most of our present troubles stem from the over-cutting of interest rates that we went into because we were afraid of a worldwide recession. I vividly remember that the Labour party clamoured for a much bigger cut in interest rates. If we had followed that siren voice, we would be even further on the rocks than we are now.

We are at the beginning, but far enough along the path to see that it is a solid beginning, of a serious change of climate. In 1979, there was a strong belief that training was something that one did only in the employer's time, only at the employer's expense and, best of all, if the employer could persuade the Government to pay for it. That attitude has changed for the better. We now have an understanding that training is a shared responsibility. Few people in employment today believe that what they know now will be sufficient for what they have to do for the rest of their employed life. They are aware of the need to retrain several times during their working life. They see it as a shared responsibility between the individual, the employer and the Government.

The Government have been imaginative in, for example, the introduction of training credits. Nothing makes it clearer for an individual that he shall have control over the sort of training that he wants and the quality for which he is looking than the knowledge that he has in his hand the finance to pay for the training that he needs. I hope that, as the CBI said to the Select Committee, it will be possible to enlarge the scheme rapidly. It is a good scheme which I should like to see tested, although not for so long that it cannot be expanded if it shows promise.

The Government have been extremely imaginative in their policy of allowing people access to courses and other forms of higher and further education at a much later stage than simply that of leaving school. I share the anxiety expressed by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East. Too many youngsters still leave school inadequately educated to go straight into a job. I derive great comfort from the fact that many of them rapidly realise that they are banging their heads on a ceiling of inadequate qualifications, and take the advantage that we have provided of going into further and higher education at a later stage.

There is a marked change of climate within universities and colleges. They are now far more entrepreneurial because they realise that if they are to survive, they will have to sell a product that students want. When I taught at a university, we taught what we were interested in and if the students did not bother to come, we went on teaching it nevertheless. Now, if the students do not come, the department closes, so departments are becoming more aware of the need to tailor what they teach to what the students want. I can give an example from my area. Few students at Kent university do not learn a foreign language at some stage, because they realise how vital that will be in the European Community.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East and his Committee were anxious about quality control in training. That is another aspiration which I share with the Committee, but I should not like the hon. Gentleman to underestimate the crucial significance of the national vocational qualification. As that operation spreads its net and becomes more widely used and known, it will make it much easier for individuals who may not have had a formal education to get credit for what they can do practically. Furthermore, it will show them when they get to a certain level that they have the same access to higher education that they would have had through the more traditional book learning that used to be the only way in. That is enormously important and we should not underestimate it.

Anything that my hon. Friend the Minister can do to diminish the bureaucracy of those national vocational qualifications would be welcome. I have seen some of those NVQ demands and they extend to many pages. They have been refined and re-refined for the highest possible motives, but they do not half make it difficult for people to extract the best that they can from the system.

There is a growing understanding among employers. The Select Committee's report suggests that employers now reckon to provide £20 billion worth of training. To give an example from my county, in Thanet the Kent training and enterprise council has helped to put together the Thanet skills initiative whereby more than 20 employers are coming together to try to influence the training that is available locally so that they get what they need rather than what the training institutions choose to provide.

Employers are showing far more interest in anticipating needs. For example, in Dover the district council, the training and enterprise council, the chamber of commerce and other local groups are coming together to make it possible for the 2,000 or so international freight forwarders who will become redundant as a result of the

[Mr. Rowe]

1992 single market to discuss and work out the sort of training that they need. We have achieved an enormous amount. The Government are right to try to create the climate and to improve the information system. They have put forward a whole range of imaginative programmes.

I conclude by making one plea to my hon. Friend the Minister. There is a mass of evidence, which I shall be happy to provide him with if he has not already seen it, that employers are completely lunatic about the age requirement that they attach to various jobs. For example, they expect secretaries to be under 30. They are extremely reluctant to employ older people. They frequently will not even give an older person an interview. They will put up all kinds of smokescreens, the commonest one being that older people are not a good investment because they do not stay long. All the evidence that I have seen suggests that older men and women stay longer in employment than their younger counterparts. They say that older men and women are too inflexible to learn. That is rubbish and it can be demonstrated again and again.

I know that my hon. Friend and our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State believe that to some extent the market will take care of that. The market may do so up to a point but, as in many markets when there is an information gap, the Government need to take an initiative, along with employers' organisations and trade unions, to break down the walls of prejudice against the employment of the older worker. If we do not do that, how in heaven's name will older people be able to finance the 30, 40 or, in some cases, 50 years that they will have outside the labour market? That will become an enormous charge on our children and our grandchildren.

I commend the Government for a number of imaginative initiatives. I detect a major change in Britain in the climate towards employment training and I ask the Government to take a serious look at the obstacles against the employment of older people.

8.14 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Once again, the House is indebted to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) and his Select Committee for producing a report which I am sure will give rise to some interesting debate. However, if I may be allowed to introduce a note of disappointment, the report is in some respects inconclusive. It has done the House a service in bringing together clearly the views of different bodies from which the Committee took evidence, but it is clear that it had some difficulties in coming to conclusions and making recommendations. That is no doubt because, as the hon. Gentleman said, this is an issue which gives rise to considerably heated debate and passions on both sides of the argument.

Few if any of those who gave evidence to the Committee, and, I think, few in the House, would dispute that unemployment is rising. The Government for some time took solace from or hid behind the figleaf of the fact that the rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom was much less than that of a number of our European competitors. But they can no longer deny that the rate of increase in unemployment in Britain is faster than most, if not all, of our European competitors.

It is important that we regularly return to address this matter. When we hear the statistics and the monthly unemployment figures, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with people and families who are suffering the frustrations and, people often feel, the indignity of unemployment. In addition, there are those who have the threat of unemployment hanging over them, not knowing whether next week their job or the job of a member of their family will be on the line.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East spent some time dealing with the impact of the exchange rate mechanism on employment levels. He drew attention to the fact that there had been few if any studies of what the impact would be in the United Kingdom. It is important to remember that the current trend of increase in unemployment in Britain long pre-dates Britain's entry into the ERM. In April last year, the tables were turned and we no longer had reports of monthly decreases in unemployment but, sadly, monthly increases. That was some six months before our entry into the ERM.

If we are looking for the causes of the current rise in unemployment to unacceptable rates, we should look to the unsustainable boom that was created by the Government not only just before the previous election but after it. Had we joined the ERM much earlier, when my right hon. and hon. Friends were advocating entry, we would not have had the high interest rates that were ultimately necessary to contain the boom created by the Government, and the problems created by that boom would have been tackled earlier within the discipline of the ERM.

Mr. Janman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the main reason for interest rates being low during 1987-88 was the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was tracking the pound to the deutschmark because of his predilection, shared by the hon. Gentleman, to join the ERM sooner rather than later? It was, therefore, a desire to peg sterling to the deutschmark—a quasi-ERM environment—that caused interest rates to be reduced and the inflation which the hon. Gentleman has accepted in his analysis.

Mr. Wallace: I could not wholly accept that argument. An important reason for the high interest rates was that the Government, through a number of measures, not least those introduced in the 1988 Budget, brought about a huge expansion in credit which they simply could not sustain. Therefore, they had to have high interest rates to bring that under control. Had we joined the ERM much earlier, in the mid-1980s, I doubt whether we would have got into the position from which we are now trying to pick up the pieces.

What would happen if we were to leave the ERM and allow the pound to devalue? I have no doubt that initially there might well be a small boost to exports, although I fear that that would soon be eaten up by subsequent inflation. Ultimately, interest rates would go up rather than down, because the markets would have no faith in the Government's willingness to tackle inflation and maintain the value of the currency. Investors would require higher interest rates to reflect the increase in the perceived risk involved in holding sterling. I am not sure that I understood the implications of what was said by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East; I believe, however,

that if we came out of the exchange rate mechanism, economic policy would lose credibility and unemployment would continue to rise rather than fall.

Politicians can no longer choose the soft option. Companies will have to face up to disciplines that will not allow the politicians to go on pretending that miracles can be worked through no more than a change in the currency. I doubt whether such pretences were effective in the past, over the long term; they are even less likely to succeed now, when economies are so closely integrated on an international basis.

If Britain sticks by its ERM commitments—if, as the Prime Minister suggested in a recent answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), there is a move to enter the narrow currency band and to make the Bank of England independent—investors, companies and employees will know that the Government mean business. Once that is understood we shall be able to embark on a path of sustainable growth, with greater economic stability, and to generate circumstances in which unemployment can not only fall but, with any luck, remain at a lower level.

Not surprisingly, the Select Committee was unable to reach a conclusion on the subject of the statutory minimum wage. As its report states, the TUC advocated such a system, but conceded that it was not

"'the perfect and only answer' to the problem of low pay".

It is also not surprising that the Institute of Directors opposed the idea. My party, too, is on record as opposing it: we do not consider that it is the right way to tackle the problem of low pay.

In trying to rubbish the arguments for a minimum wage, the Secretary of State for Employment has said that 2 million people would lose their jobs. As can be seen from recent newspaper analysis—not least in the columns of *The Independent*—his figure is based on a series of flawed hypotheses. By "hyping up" the true position, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to some extent destroyed what should have been a serious debate.

The issue between the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and me—and, I assume, between the Opposition and the Government—is not whether people should be condemned to low wages; we all accept that a high-wage, high-productivity economy brings benefits. The issue is the way in which that is to be achieved. My party strongly believes that the statutory minimum wage, by introducing a degree of "leap-frogging", could destroy jobs and, thus, lose the second or third income of a household, if not the first. Households could be pushed into poverty, while the objective is to free them from it.

By all means let us strengthen the wages councils in areas of employment where there is not much international competition. Let us also, however, embark on a process of integrating the tax and benefit systems, to produce a national minimum income for households. That, surely, is a much better way of targeting the problem of poverty. I fear that, if the statutory minimum wage were introduced, thousands would lose their jobs; and, tragically, unemployment is one of the main causes of domestic poverty.

The Select Committee agreed about the importance of skills and training. As has often been pointed out, 38 per cent. of the United Kingdom's industrial work force has received some skilled vocational training, compared with 67 per cent. in the Länder that make up what was formerly West Germany. The figure is 79 per cent. in Italy, and 80 per cent. in France. There is an obvious gulf between us and the countries that we shall shortly join in a single market, and with which we shall soon compete even more keenly.

Over the years, successive Governments and employers have placed us at a competitive disadvantage by not taking training seriously enough. The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) thinks that the climate may be changing, but I feel that the Government have their own role to play. Even after last month's announcement by the Secretary of State of further measures to promote training, including increased funding, the Government—as the Secretary of State did not deny on that occasion—are spending less on training than they were when unemployment stood at 2 million and was falling. Now it stands at 2·25 million, and is rising. That strikes me as unbelievably shortsighted.

Earlier today, my party published its proposals for tackling unemployment. Those proposals do not shrink from the need to provide additional funding for employment training—so that we can improve quality as well as increasing the number of places—and to ensure that those who find themselves unemployed are given an opportunity to retrain and to learn new skills. We also want to give women a chance to return to work and to make a worthwhile contribution.

We are talking about an investment in people—an investment to which the present Government have not been prepared to commit themselves wholeheartedly. The Minister says, "Tut, tut", but he knows full well that the Government's contribution is declining when it should be increasing. I know that he has a brief from which to argue, but surely, in his heart of hearts, he knows that at a time of rising unemployment the Government should be spending far more on training.

Much, if not all, of the youth training system is now administered through training and local enterprise councils—TECs and LECs. May I give an example from my constituency? A young girl there, who was about to embark on a training course arranged through the Training Agency in Inverness, now finds that she cannot do so because the LEC that is now responsible claims that it cannot afford to pay. On further examination, I discovered that the previous arrangements for the Training Agency involved swings and roundabouts.

In my constituency, as the Minister will appreciate, the cost of board and lodging for a young person going away to train can be considerable; the circumstances are different when the training takes place virtually on the person's doorstep. Given the geographical character of LECs, which operate in areas that are remote from the national training centres, they are bound to incur a heavy burden in funding board and lodging.

I hope that the Minister will appreciate the difficulties in these early days. When training is provided on a national and regional basis the costs can be equalised, but that will not always be possible with LECs. The Minister may not be able to give me an answer immediately, but I trust that he will look into the matter, because it may recur increasingly as the TECs and the LECs bed down.

We should not merely bemoan unemployment. There seems little point in comparing the numbers who are unemployed in the various constituencies with the Conservative majorities there unless we are also prepared to say what we are going to do about the problem. My hon. Friends and I have tried to do something. I do not

[Mr. Wallace]

pretend that ours is the complete answer; indeed, we believe that the recession is too deep for it to be possible to wave a magic wand overnight and achieve full employment. We believe, however, that the Government have a duty to make an effort.

We have identified, for instance, the capital funds that are locked up in local authority bank accounts as a result of council house sales. We believe that those accounts could be unlocked to fund a housing programme involving not only new build but renovation. School buildings could also be improved. I am sure that many of us have been asked why a local school has a leaking roof when people are on the dole. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East cited the company bankruptcy figures; they show that, in recent months, the construction industry above all has suffered, and needs a boost.

We have also targeted energy efficiency. We believe that that is worthwhile because it leads to proper stewardship of resources. Also, if people improve the efficiency and insulation of their houses, there will be lower fuel bills which will particularly help those on lower incomes. That sort of work tends to be job intensive and more emphasis and resources should be devoted to an energy efficiency scheme.

We also believe that more should be done to try to stimulate small businesses. Nine out of 10 businesses going out of business employ fewer than 100 people. It is always the large redundancies that hit the headlines on "News at Ten", but the cumulative effect comes from small businesses which have to make people redundant as they go to the wall.

The 10·9 per cent. increase in the uniform business rate this year—the maximum by which the Government could have increased it—was a criminal blow to small businesses. The Chancellor did some things in his Budget to help small businesses, but those things have been swamped by the additional revenue that businesses up and down the country will have to pay in UBR. We propose more help with the administrative costs of setting up new ventures. We should try to devise ways in which to bridge the traditional gap that has been identified in this country between those with good ideas and those who convert them into further development and production. Assistance should be given through seedcorn enterprise initiatives. We want to help businesses that suffer from the late payment of debts. That would be done by a statutory right to charge interest on outstanding debt.

Some six weeks ago, the Chancellor said that rising unemployment was a price worth paying. I do not accept that and neither do the British people. There is a high cost of unemployment in terms of people's income, homes—there is an increased number of repossessions—and health and well-being. That is certainly not a price worth paying. The Government have to pay a crude price in terms of increased benefit. It is estimated that it costs £300 million for every 100,000 extra unemployed. There is a duty on the Government to try to do more than they have done up to now to reduce the impact of the recession. Mass unemployment is not inevitable. Other economies such as Japan, the United States, France and Germany have succeeded in having lower unemployment and lower inflation. The Government lack the political will to achieve a similar end.

8.32 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said that Germany has had lower unemployment than Britain. For much of the past few years Germany has had higher unemployment than Britain and the new united Germany has considerably higher unemployent. Because of the existence of minimum wages in some parts of the German economy —there is not an across-the-board national minimum wage as the Labour party tries to suggest—there is a particularly acute problem with youth unemployment in Germany, which is far worse than in Britain. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland should do his homework before making gauche statements about German employment.

We are debating future levels of employment and unemployment. I do not wish to discuss in great detail what was said in the Select Committee because many of those in the Chamber are members of the Select Committee and it would be somewhat incestuous to go over what we have already debated. If we are to make assessments about the future level of employment and unemployment, we must look at the factors that will affect the statistics. We have to ask who will be in government, what will be their monetary policy and will we stay in the exchange rate mechanism?

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) and I are such good companions on the Select Committee that I nearly called him my hon. Friend. The fact that he would not give way to me earlier was a break in a great custom. I think that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East was exaggerating slightly when he talked about ERM membership in that—he said as much later in his speech—to all intents and purposes the die is cast for unemployment trends in the next 12 months. Membership of the ERM may mean that unemployment is slightly higher than it would otherwise have been because the Government lose a degree of economic and political freedom in how they manage the squeezing of inflation out of the system.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland did not really contradict my intervention during his speech because the credit boom that he mentioned was due to the low interest rates, which were in turn due to the desire of the then Chancellor to peg the pound to the deutschmark. He had to lower interest rates to keep the 3:1 ratio. He wanted to take us into the ERM sooner rather than later.

I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-East that membership of the ERM will probably mean that for the time between entry and the next year or so unemployment will be higher than it would otherwise have been. However, I do not think that it will be much higher. It is a matter of degree and I do not think that it will make any fundamental difference to the general trend that we shall see.

The important issue is what sort of Government we will have in the future, what monetary policy they will pursue, what the consequent level of inflation will be, and how much intervention and renationalisation of industries will occur. Will we have a Government, such as that we have now, who are making the right decisions about the fundamental structural issues in the economy and who have implemented the correct policies and philosophies over the past 10 years, or will we have a Government who go back to the bad old habits of saying that politicians and

bureaucrats know best and know more about how to run businesses than business men or more about running industry than industrialists? We would inevitably return to that scenario if there were a Labour Government after the next election. We would then see the distortion of resource allocation in the economy that we saw in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time one man's job may have been lost in order to keep somebody else in a job which, in any real economy, would have disappeared because of technological change or because such over-manning would not be allowed.

What will happen in the future about the attitudes and activities of trade unions? To some extent, that will depend upon the Government. Will we return to the good old corporatist days of the 1960s and 1970s? I am not making a purely party political point because, even when my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was running the country, we had the corporatist beer and sandwiches at No. 10 just as we did under a Labour Government. We do not want to return to that, but I fear that under a Labour Government we would.

As I have said, the crucial questions involve who will be in power, what will be their monetary policy, whether they will be determined to get inflation down and keep it down and whether they will be prepared to discipline themselves not to intervene in the economy to distort where resources go. It all boils down to whether we will have stability.

The speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North-East was one of unmitigated gloom. At least the speech of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland contained one optimistic phrase. I think that he understands the need to achieve, in the near future, the important objective of stability. I believe that we are well on the way to achieving that with a halving of inflation during the past six months. Then, with the discipline of the ERM or the self-imposed discipline from the Bank of England and Treasury, if we keep our monetary policy tight and ensure that people pay themselves only in line with what is being produced and keep unit labour costs competitive with Germany, the United States, Japan and our other main competitors, we will see a golden decade for Britain in manufacturing and service industries. That is how we shall return to rising employment and growth.

Before returning to those fundamentals, a word about unemployment in my constituency. In July 1986, unemployment in the Thurrock constituency was 5,723. In June 1987, it had fallen to 4,965. In May this year, it had fallen to 3,879—21·9 per cent less than in June 1987. That is the biggest fall since June 1987 in any Essex constituency, and the 17th biggest fall among the 182 constituencies in London and the south-east. I do not pretend that things are not difficult and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will recognise that that is so, but I want him to know that business in my constituency is bearing up well.

There are several reasons for that. Two or three years ago, the then Secretary of State for Employment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), took the imaginative and courageous step of abolishing the dock labour scheme. Would a future Labour Government return to the bad old days of the dock labour scheme? My Labour opponent is always going on about bringing back the scheme, but I have not noticed the same enthusiasm among Labour's employment spokesmen. Perhaps he was trying to persuade my constituents to vote for him by making false promises.

The dock labour scheme has gone, and good riddance to it. The port of Tilbury is now competitive and in the latest financial year made a profit of £3 million. It is attracting new business and even surprises itself by continually breaking productivity records. Once the ports legislation being considered by the other place is given Royal Assent it will become a plc and more real jobs will be created.

Lakeside shopping centre, which attracted a third of a billion pounds of private sector investment, has been completed and is the largest retail shopping centre in Europe. Once it is up and running—it takes four or five years for turnover to reach its peak in such enterprises—it will provide about 5,000 jobs.

I say that it will provide 5,000 jobs, but that will depend who is governing the country. If a socialist Government enact phase two of their minimum wage proposals, whereby the minimum wage will be 66 per cent. of average wages, I suspect that considerably fewer than 5,000 jobs will be created. Many industrial sectors, particularly the retail sector, will employ fewer people because of the minimum wage. I see the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) squirming, so I will return to that subject later.

The Government set only the overall environment for employment, but local authorities can make a difference to employment. Grays, which is the biggest town in my constituency, is only 23 miles from London and three miles from the M25. Sadly, unlike many other south-east councils, the local council has been in the grip of socialist control for much of the past 20 years. It has not had the imagination and vision to attract the private sector office development that many other south-east towns have been able to attract. Employment is affected not only by what is going on nationally but by what is going on locally.

Only recently, the local council, in its wisdom, turned down planning permission for a Hilton hotel, which would have created 150 jobs. I am supporting the appeal against that decision to the Secretary of State for the Environment in order to secure those jobs.

What will happen if the national environment changes? Every Labour Government since the mid-1920s have increased unemployment. I see no evidence to convince me, the House or the public that the track record of a future Labour Government would do any better than their predecessors. Why should a future Labour Government be different, especially as in its policy documents the Labour party of 1991 has proposed a minimum wage, which was wisely discarded in 1969 by the former Labour Secretary of State, Barbara Castle? She described a report of an inter-departmental working party on the national minimum wage as essential reading. Page 43 of the report concluded:

> "The greater cost to the national minimum, the greater the consequent adjustment in the level of employment is likely to be. Any consequential unemployment would tend to affect development areas in particular."

The Labour party's proposals for a minimum wage are madness; it is an economic cloud cuckoo land. I have some sympathy with the suggestion of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland that an increase in unemployment of 2 million is an exaggeration, but it is not clear that it is definitely an exaggeration. The consequences of phase two of the Labour party's proposals, which would impose a national minimum wage not at 50 per cent. but at two thirds of the median wage, are clear. It is clear from the

[Mr. Tim Janman]

comments of the TUC's general economic committee and of trade unionists such as Gavin Laird, Eric Hammond and Bill Jordan—I do not have time to give the many quotes to support what I am saying, but we all accept that it is true—that, all other things being equal and constant, phase two of its proposals and the full restoration of differentials would lead to a large increase in unemployment. One million jobs, 2 million jobs or more may be lost, but whatever the figure, a heck of a lot of jobs will be lost and a heck of a lot of lives will be affected and inconvenienced by the dogmatic and ideological policies of the Labour party.

The trends for unemployment and employment in the next 12 to 18 months are already set. We have seen the unfortunate incursion of inflation into our economy, but the Government are successfully squeezing it out. We hope that that process will be over as soon as possible and that it will be as effective as possible so that we can get our economy back on an even keel and can begin to achieve the growth that we enjoyed in the mid-1980s. I believe that once the economy is stabilised, the increase in unemployment will reach a plateau and will then decrease. It is important that we have zero inflation and that unit labour costs can compete with those of our competitors. If we can achieve that—as I believe that the Government will after they are re-elected—we shall have a fine future.

The alternative is the same as that which the electorate dismissed at the previous three general elections—a party whose polices are wholly contradictory and which involve high taxation, high public spending, high borrowing, or all three. It is a party that cannot resist the temptation to intervene, to meddle in industry and to cause resources to be wasted. It is a party that cannot resist giving in to and being governed by its paymasters, the trade unions. Its policies are a recipe for very high unemployment for a very long time.

8.50 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I have sat in the Chamber on many occasions to listen to debates about employment and employment training. I listened to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) who is a member of a party which since 1979 has created the highest recorded level of unemployment. I wonder whether we should be allowed —in parliamentary terms—to call members of that party the names that we should like to call them instead of having to talk to the press as happened a week or so ago when the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) called the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) a liar. We are not allowed to say such things in the Chamber without being challenged, but we can say them outside. The people to whom I refer are strangers to the truth and they throw around their statistics in their replies to questions and in their arguments. Perhaps those people should sit back and listen for a little while and I shall tell them what has happened in my constituency.

The facts are impressed on my mind because they affect my constituents who have been thrown out of work. If one reads the book by Nye Bevan called "In Place of Fear" —and I recommend that Conservative Members read it —one learns that he was blacklisted by employers in his constituency of Ebbw Vale because of his stammering and because of his actions as a mineworkers' leader. He had to roam the mountains because he could not get a job. One of Nye's ideas was that if as politicians we do only one thing, it should be to ensure that everyone has a job.

Before you call me to order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall refer to the supply estimates and the Department of Employment. I thought that I had better check some of the Department's figures to see whether their suggestions given in replies to questions are correct. However, page 1 of the document entitled "Supply Estimates 1991-92" states blatantly that the Government will reduce the amount of funding by more than £400 million. Therefore, when talking about employment it is no good their arguing that they will try to get us out of the present grim situation —they have no intention of doing so, as their own figures show.

I said that I would mention my constituency and what has happened to it since 1979 because that is relevant to the debate. In 1979, my constituency had an unemployment rate of 3·7 per cent. When that figure was analysed, the Department of Employment informed me that 2 per cent. of those registered were unemployable because they were silicotic or pneumoconiotic. At that time, my constituency contained seven collieries and there were 6,500 miners. It also had 12,000 steelworkers, but within two years the Government had decided to de-man the steelworks on the ground that they were not making a profit. However, only last week we found that they are not making a profit now, despite all the cuts that the Government have made. Because of the 12,000 redundant and unemployed steelworkers and the 6,500 unemployed miners, the unemployment rate in my constituency increased within those two years to 35 per cent. Therefore, in an electorate of about 83,000, 30 per cent. became unemployed.

As a result, some members of the Trades Union Congress in Mid Glamorgan and officers of my constituency party decided to accept the Government's proposals for unemployment training or, as it was at that time, the community programme, and to introduce an employment training scheme. We did so and it was very successful. During its 10 years, it trained 4,000 people. In fact, it not only trained them but got them jobs. However, overnight the Government decided that they would revoke employment training and introduce the training and enterprise councils. That was the biggest disaster that has ever happened in Mid Glamorgan and especially in my constituency.

I mention that for the benefit of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench who will deal with employment when we have the next Labour Government—that will probably be in November if the Prime Minister so decides, or perhaps in June. However, the next Labour Government will in all probability also have to deal with the contentious issue of how to get people back to work. I am sure that their efforts will be sincere and that they will be directed towards getting the people who are currently out of work back into employment.

We have listened to ex-Ministers telling people to get on their bikes. If my constituents had done so in 1981 and if they had come to the east coast, they might have found a job. They could now get on their bikes or their roller skates or start to walk—I doubt whether they would be able to afford roller skates because of the cuts in unemployment benefit. If they came on their roller skates or by foot to the east coast, there would be no chance of their finding a job.

I have made an effort as the chairman of an organisation called Cato—community activities and training in Ogmore. Despite the arguments used by my colleagues in the Labour party and in the trade unions, we decided to set up an organisation to train people. We not only trained people, but combined with that training a programme of community enterprise in Ogmore to ensure that we were doing something of benefit for the area. We provided training in catering and at the same time provided meals on wheels, which had been axed because of Government cuts in funding to local government. We provided a service and trained people at the same time. That went on for 10 years. However, overnight we found out that the TEC in Mid Glamorgan had decided to cut our programme, and told us that our contract would not be renewed in March. That meant immediate unemployment for 45 qualified and experienced trainers who had given 10 years of service to an organisation whose aim was to train people desperate for a job. In addition, 210 trainees were immediately put out of a training programme. They were promised that they would have a programme and a job, but 12 months after the TEC's decision to close down Cato, those trainees are still looking for a place in Ogmore in which to be trained.

Two hours and 22 minutes is not a lot of time for the House to debate the contentious issue of unemployment. I do not want continually to bandy statistics with Conservative Members. However, I am sure that people who may be listening or who may read the report of this unemployment debate are not especially interested in statistics if they are unemployed. If one tells anyone in my constituency that more than 2 million people are unemployed, he is not especially concerned or interested —people are interested in the fact that they are unemployed and that there is no chance of a job for them. There is no mine for them to go to now. People only went down the mine in desperation, and not through choice.

My father was a miner. The last thing he said to me was, "Whatever you do, don't go down the mine." If there were no jobs or if a person was not qualified, there was no alternative but to go down the mine. As the seven mines in my constituency have been closed, there is now no chance of a mining job. If the Government had decided to provide factories or to help the existing factories in my constituency, that might have been a help, but they did not. A number of us had to persuade foreign companies to come to the Ogmore constituency. Sony provided us with 3,000 jobs and we persuaded the Ford engine plant in Bridgend to expand its programme so that more people could be employed.

In my constituency, and in Mid Glamorgan in general, there has been a considerable reduction in employment. With the advent of unemployment in my constituency, I decided to introduce a ten-minute Bill about the TEC in Mid Glamorgan. Having read the document that was sent to all TEC chairmen on 12 December 1990 about the first internal audit of training and enterprise councils, and as we are dealing with billions of pounds of public money, it may be of interest again to put this important matter on the record.

The permanent secretary at the Department of Employment—Sir Geoffrey Holland KCB—sent a letter to all chairmen of the TECs asking them to ensure that they had an internal audit. One of the paragraphs of that letter explained:

> "I do so because of the weaknesses in financial management they reveal, and the disquieting overall picture . . .
>
> The Public Accounts Committee would not regard such a situation as satisfactory. I write primarily because I am anxious that you should be able to defend yourself before the Public Accounts Committee should they call you at any time."

Sir Geoffrey continued on the subject of the weaknesses discovered by the audit in some TECs at that time:

> "(a) Claims made by the council which could not be supported by adequate documetary evidence.
> (b) Claims overstated by the inclusion of expenditure which was outside the terms of the contract.
> (c) Attendance records not being properly maintained by training providers.
> (d) Financial appraisal and monitoring of providers not being carried out, and
> (e) Excessive working capital loans and substantial cash balances being held.
> It is very probable that these same issues are occurring at other operational councils which have not yet received a visit from my internal auditors."

Needless to say, my first action was to ask for an internal audit of the Mid Glamorgan TECs. I am still waiting for a reply from the Secretary of State for Wales on when he will have an internal audit conducted.

I have here the Secretary of State's answers to the numerous parliamentary questions that I have tabled. There is plenty of documentary evidence, but I have been told not to speak for too long. Some Conservative Members may wish to speak, so I shall not refer to all the documents that I have, but I would have liked to have the opportunity to support my case even more thoroughly. In his replies to my questions about how many places have been cut in Mid Glamorgan, the Secretary of State says that the information is not available. When I ask why, I am given to understand that it is because the Mid Glamorgan TEC is now a public limited company and we cannot get the information direct. It is high time that that was changed. When we table questions we should be able to find out the information that we require.

I have a lot to say, but I shall conclude by referring to the TEC operating agreement—a document of great importance to my constituents and myself in explaining to 45 trainers, some 200 trainees and some 350 people on a youth scheme why the TEC decided not to continue our agreement.

Our agreement was concluded in a single month. The Government say that training organisations have to accept a contract with such terms before they can be registered and operate as trainers. However, the operating agreement between the Secretary of State for Employment and a training and enterprise council affords a TEC the opportunity of affecting the agreement. If the Government wish to withdraw from an agreement with a TEC six months notice must be given, yet they compel training organisations to sign contracts specifying only one month's notice.

I have been told by the Whip that it is time to finish my speech. I am a Whip myself, so I shall do so, but I should like to have been given the opportunity to continue for some time, because I have been trying to explain to the House how the country is being deluded into accepting some of the statistics that the Government portray as representing the level of unemployment. They should have a look at the real world. They should come down to my surgery on a Saturday and speak to people who have no chance of a job and who are trying to exist on their meagre

[Mr. Ray Powell]

unemployment benefits. They find that their houses are to be repossessed because they cannot make their mortgage payments, that they cannot continue payments on their car and that they cannot furnish their tables as they furnished them when they were in full employment. Yet we are told that the Government are making every effort to ensure that people are back in work. All I can say is that that is not happening in Ogwr, in Mid Glamorgan or in Wales generally. I do not know what is happening elsewhere, but in any case it is high time that the Government were thrown out of office to enable a Labour Government to take control and try to remedy the situation. Such a remedy is long overdue.

9.11 pm

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington): People come to my surgeries, too. One of them, Mrs. Lynne Fleming, came along to say that, although she was happy with her status as a self-employed secretary, as were her clients and the Inland Revenue, the Department of Social Security had intervened to classify her as employed on the basis that she did not carry her heavy word processing equipment around from job to job. As a result, she lost her clients because they were not prepared to pay the costs of her full-time employment, and she had to close her business.

Further investigation revealed that both the Inland Revenue and the Department of Social Security were reclassifying as employed whole groups of people previously classified as self-employed on the basis of absurd and biased tests to determine their relative status. I have written evidence from many accountants that numerous people have lost their jobs as a result. One accountant writes:

"I have countless examples in my files of the Revenue using dubious requirements to force people out of business."

When their businesses close, we as taxpayers face a hefty bill for their state benefits—all for the sake of identifying amounts of back tax and advancing the careers of some income tax inspectors.

I accept that, under this Government, self-employment has grown by 65 per cent., but I contend that the figure would be higher still, and that unemployment would be lower, if we revised these absurd tests, perhaps moving to some kind of self-certification system for the self-employed. That really would be the mark of a radical, free-enterprise Government.

In the arcane jargon of the Civil Service, employment budgets are based not on forecasts of unemployment but on Treasury "assumptions" of unemployment. In the autumn statement, £305 million was cut from the employment training budget. That cut was based on the Treasury's assumption that unemployment would be at 1·75 million throughout this year—a flat figure to apply right through the year. Flatly, that was wrong.

Unemployment began rising in April 1990 and the trend in our economy and in unemployment should have been clear by the time of the autumn statement. We entered the exchange rate mechanism in October 1990 and, as hon. Members have shown, it must have been known by then that entry would have a significant upward effect on unemployment.

The response from the Department of Employment—in February 1991—was to put £120 million back into the employment training budget. In March 1991, the Department put £38 million back in to expanding job clubs, and in June 1991 it put a further £35 million into employment training. It appears that unrealistic assumptions were made about unemployment, and that there was an apparent disregard for the effect of our membership of the ERM. I am arguing for the process of reaction to trends in unemployment to be telescoped so that we can avoid the nonsense of increasing expenditure on unemployment when it is falling and decreasing expenditure when it is rising.

In the 1980s, it gradually became accepted among the chattering classes and the major political parties that we should join the exchange rate mechanism "when the time was right". That last phrase, which was consensual and diplomatic, even managed to keep some of the doubters on board on the basis that perhaps the time never would be right. However, no one publicised in advance the likely effects on unemployment of joining the ERM.

The Confederation of British Industry and the TUC were great enthusiasts of the idea, but they sheepishly had to admit to us that they had made no calculations. If the major political parties knew the cost, they were not saying. It is possible that, somewhere in the bowels of the Treasury, some Gollum-like civil servant egested some gloomy predictions, but he and his figures, in advance of our joining the ERM, were not allowed to see the light of day.

It is strange that the major organisations representing the employers and the employees could be all atwitter about the particular policies without considering the fundamental consequences. The Secretary of State for Employment made no prediction about the effect on unemployment of our joining the ERM. However, it is clear from the *National Institute Economic Review* that unemployment rose by 700,000 in France and by 1 million in Italy as a result of their joining the ERM.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) has already referred to the evidence of the chief economic adviser to the CBI, which was published rather late in the day in March 1991. That showed that Britain would probably suffer an extra 500,000 unemployed as a result of the ERM membership—if it works.

I am not necessarily attacking the ERM. I voted for it as an experiment. However, at least we now know the price tag involved. In addition, some people would argue that, with the monetary indicators as they are and with unemployment as it is, we would have been able to reduce interest rates rather more quickly and more easily than we have done in the ERM. That may be the other part of the price tag.

What is scandalous, and what beggars belief, is that the Government, the Opposition and the so-called social partners could all be gung-ho about a particular policy without telling the public about its likely effects. If we embark on other European adventures, I trust that we will have the common sense to look at the downside as well as the upside of those policies, and that we will have the guts to be open about them.

Although I may be wrong, it appears to me that there has been a conspiracy of silence enrobing us as we have drifted gently towards the holy grail of ever closer European monetary union. But now I think at least one person may jerk us back to reality, much as that may annoy the nodding boatmen.

9.17 pm

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Let us be clear about unemployment. It is not an act of God. It does not just happen; it is made to happen. In fact, it is a direct result of the so-called market economy—in other words, of the capitalist system.I am not talking about Adam Smith's capitalism; I am talking about monopoly capitalism and the capitalism of big business represented by the Conservative party. The Government must accept responsibility for the present situation. They must accept the blame for the fact that so many people have lost out in this country.

Of course, the Government will no doubt protest their innocence and say, "Judge us on our overall record." I suppose that that is fair enough. Let us consider what has happened in our constituencies as plants have closed down. In my constituency, we have lost Robbs shipyard, Raimes Clark manufacturing chemists, Motherwell Bridge, the Victoria Rubber Company and, more recently, Caledonia Flour Mills and SAI. SAI was closed down deliberately because the Government were opposed to its takeover by Kemira. Why? Because Kemira is a Finnish state-owned organisation. The Government speak about market forces, yet they allowed blind party dogma to interfere with those forces.

There are also problems at other plants in the Leith area. Although Ferranti and NEI are still producing goods, their work forces have been much reduced. People have been paid off thanks to the so-called "recession" which the Government claim is now about to be resolved and will quickly disappear. I doubt that. Too often, people in Britain have been told to get on their bikes and to look for another job. I suppose that that explains what one sees in various parts of London. There are many Scots around Victoria. Indeed, many people from my constituency are living in cardboard city because they have nowhere else to go. They came here believing that they would get a job in this great city of London, but they could not. This country has economic refugees. They are the people who have lost because of the Government. In the past, Scotland had the highland clearances; today we have the lowland clearances, as my hon. Friends could testify.

Unemployment is not unique to Britain, but it is rising fast here. By next year, it is estimated that 3 million people or more will be unemployed. However, that is only part of the story, because many other people will be on short time. It is estimated that 5 million people will be working part-time. In the past, the excuse always used to be, "It is the unions' fault." That was the message given out by the Conservatives. However, that is a bogus argument, because there have been very few disputes in recent years, and, sadly, union membership has declined.

The other reason the Tories gave for things going wrong was that wage rates were too high. They do not say that to Sir Ian MacLaurin of Tesco, who gets £1·5 million a year, or to the other bigwigs, such as the judges, the generals, the police chiefs and the bosses. But that is what they say to the young lasses and laddies who work for Tesco and who receive only £5,000 per year instead of the huge sums of money that their bosses get from the exploitation of both young and older workers.

The Tories always argued in the past that one could price oneself into or out of a job. The Tories are strong on the law, but they have ignored the wages councils. There have been repeated cases of both young and older workers being underpaid simply because the number of wages council inspectors has been reduced. In 1978, there were 171 inspectors, but today there are only 71 inspectors to check on the Scrooge employers. That explains why, although the Low Pay Unit has made it clear that one third of the firms checked underpaid their employees—that is just the tip of the iceberg—there have been very few prosecutions. In 1988, only 10 firms were prosecuted, but more than 5,000 were breaking the law. That explains a lot about the Government. It explains that they are a Government of low wages and cheap labour. Their youth training scheme conscripted young workers to do menial tasks for little money. Training schemes indeed!

If the Government could justify low wages by proving that the economy would take off, they might be acceptable, but India has not become a booming economy on the basis of low wages. Low wages are not a panacea. Unemployemnt is rising because Britain has not invested in new equipment, ideas or technology. Part of the cause is the exchange rate mechanism and the overvalued pound. Anyone who looks back to the 1920s when Britain was on the gold standard will understand the lessons of that period. We must invest in new machines, people, training, skills and education, and we can afford to do so. Despite the Government's mismanagement of the economy, we have many resources, including the talents of the people and oil. It is simply a question of using our talents and wealth to good effect. That is why we speak of a citizens' charter.

We also need a workers' charter which will guarantee real jobs—jobs with a future, jobs that will sort out the economic mess, and jobs that will provide homes, hospitals and roads and rebuild and regenerate the economy. We need a statutory minimum wage, a 35-hour week and equal pay for equal work. However, we shall not get those unless we have a Labour Government. We need socialist policies, which will extend democracy and give power to the people who produce our wealth. The sooner we have a general election the better, because the people back home are desperate for one.

9.27 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I am not sure whether I can rise to the expectations of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) but I shall try to deal with the key issues that have emerged this evening. I congratulate the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment on the report that his Committee has prepared. Although its conclusions may not have led us to a definitive debate, the issues are important and have formed the backdrop to our debate.

It is important to appreciate that we are debating this issue against the background of some sombre forecasts which have been made in Europe and this country. The report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggests that our investment possibilities in the next year are extremely gloomy. We have the worst forecast for business investment next year compared with the United States at 6·4 per cent., Japan at 4·4 per cent., Germany at 4·8 per cent.—the United Kingdom rate is forecast at only 0·6 per cent. No other EC country is likely to do so badly. That is important to the long-term aspirations of the next Labour Government and it is extremely depressing that the present Government will leave such a legacy to us.

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

The City and academic institutions have forecast the levels of unemployment that lie ahead in 1992. It is clear from those forecasts that the much hoped for reduction in unemployment will simply not emerge next year. The forecasts are extremely gloomy and range from more than 3 million to 2·3 million. The Select Committee report states in paragraph 4 that the CBI

"expected the turning point in unemployment to arise between six and 12 months after the turning point in economic activity."

It is salutary to remember that unemployment in that last Conservative recession started to rise in November 1979 and did not stop rising until July 1986—it rose for nearly seven years. It would be complacent to think that a short-term consumer boom such as the one being devised by the Government will have any immediate impact on rising unemployment.

This debate is essentially about the Government's economic record—about 12 years of wasted opportunity for millions of people. It is about the Government's failure to deal with the deep-seated structural problems that were with us in 1979 and are still with us in 1991. It is also about the Government's failure to deal with unemployment as a serious economic issue. In Britain there are 2·2 million unemployed but they also have 1·8 million dependants, so unemployment is blighting the lives of almost 4 million men, women and children. That is a sad reflection on a Government who are supposed to have engineered economic miracles.

The statistics of Government failure are stark and worth repeating. A further 10,000 people have been added to the dole queue every month since 1979—and the Government talk about economic success and lecture the Labour party about policies designed to bring down unemployment. Great claims are made about jobs. The most serious claim made by Ministers is that 1·3 million more people are in work now than in 1979. That is just not true; 460,000 of them are people with extra jobs, not more people in jobs; 411,000 training places are described as jobs. So after 12 years of Conservative Government 165,000 full-time jobs have been created—the worst employment record in Europe. That is the reality behind the rhetoric.

Conservative Members representing the north-west must ask the Secretary of State for Employment why fewer people there and in the north are in jobs in 1991 than in June 1979. For them, the economic miracle does not stand up to objective scrutiny.

Vacancies are also a key indicator. In January 1980, when statistics were first compiled, 193,400 vacancies were recorded at job centres, a number that slumped to 106,000 in May this year.

Skills are another key labour market indicator. Every objective criterion shows that the skills crisis is deepening and that the skills gap between Britain and its major competitors is widening.

If we want evidence about unemployment we need look no further than the Government's record. They have failed on the four key labour market indicators. I challenge the Minister to wish away this doubling of unemployment, this almost complete failure to create jobs, this skills crisis and this slump in vacancies.

The labour market is singularly ill equipped to deal with the problems that lie ahead, partly because of de-skilling, partly because of massive de-regulation and partly because of the destabilisation caused by so many people looking for a job. Jobs are still the fulcrum of our culture, but people are denied the chance to have one.

I charge the Government with three accusations. First, they are the party of mass unemployment and have been instrumental in its creation by using it as a weapon of economic management. They have been indifferent to its effects and they have been instinctively unable to take unemployment seriously or to provide the positive action that the unemployed and the nation require.

Secondly, the Tories are exacting a high price from individuals, the economy and, in particular, from taxpayers for the high level of unemployment. The Chancellor said that it was a price well worth paying. That is certainly true if the Government want to waste taxpayers' money and lives, and remove skills and capacity from an economy that badly needs them.

Thirdly, it is quite clear that the Government knew that unemployment would rise sharply, and I shall provide evidence about that. Even though the Government were aware of that, they failed to take positive action.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): Nonsense.

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Gentleman says nonsense, but the only action was a statement a few weeks ago by the Secretary of State for Employment in which he introduced more job clubs and some employment action. I shall deal with that later.

I shall start unfolding this shabby tale by looking at a key minute which has been raised in the House before but which is worth mentioning again. It is a memorandum dated 15 May of a meeting between the G10 chairman and Sir Geoffrey Holland. For the first time there is documented evidence of a Government prediction about employment in the following year. It states:

"In both London and Sheffield the forecast for the period October 90 to October 91 was for a 50 per cent. rise in the levels of unemployment. Any arguments that the Treasury therefore had for a reduction in funding were now completely eroded and in fact there was a demonstrable justification for further funds."

Was that a minute of what the permanent secretary in the Department said at the meeting or was it the G10 chairman making a forecast that had emanated from Sheffield and London? It is clear that the Government were able to forecast in October 1990 that employment would rise by 50 per cent.—an increase of 860,000 in 12 months.

Why was there no action in January, February, March, April or May? In June, the Secretary of State for Employment made a statement in which he unfolded some new initiatives to tackle a problem that was evident in March last year when unemployment started to rise and which was crystal clear by October when forecasts were made. Do 2·2 million people have to be unemployed before the Government find it sensible and prudent to act?

History has a habit of repeating itself. I shall quote from a press notice dated 3 February 1983 issued by the then Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Dealing with rising unemployment, the press notice stated:

"In the meantime the Government is already helping about 650,000 people avoid unemployment through a range of special measures costing about £1,500,000".

That shows that unemployment is not a new issue for the Government. They must be masters at dealing with it,

although the outcome of their actions does not confirm that judgment. It is interesting to compare that press notice with the statement by the Secretary of State for Employment on 19 June this year. He said:

"The Government is already providing a wide range of employment and training programmes helping 650,000 unemployed people this year".

In both 1983 and 1991, 650,000 people were being helped and unemployment was over 2 million. If the country had done so well, why have the unemployed done so badly? Why is it that, after nearly a decade of booms and busts, we are back to the position that existed in 1983?

Mr. Janman: Given that a future Labour Government would not take us out of the exchange rate mechanism, and that the Shadow Chancellor has said that the only public spending priorities of a future Labour Government would be child benefit and pensions because that would not create a false boom, what difference would a Labour Government make, and what would they do to change the situation?

Mr. McLeish: I wish that I had more time to address the serious issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised. The Government do not want to give us more time to discuss unemployment because of the difficulties that they are in, but it is an important subject. If the Government persist in creating another consumer boom that is not investment led, we shall end up with the same problems that we have endured for the past 12 years. The Government have not addressed the important agenda of regional policy, industrial strategy and the supply side initiative. However, a Labour Government will address it, with resulting benefits.

In their statement on 19 June, the Government said that they wanted to address a particular problem. It is instructive to look briefly at their response after unemployment hit 2·2 million. First, we shall have an unemployment action programme to create 30,000 jobs this year and 30,000 next year, so that by the end of next year 60,000 will have been created. The problem is that this will serve in this financial year only 30,000 people so it is a pity that the 960,000 people who have been unemployed for more than six months will not benefit. Some would describe that as a drop in the ocean, but I shall not be so uncharitable. That means that 50 people in each constituency may be helped by this dramatic new measure to tackle rising unemployment.

Secondly, the Secretary of State now wants to give 15,000 places back to the employment training programme. It is unfortunate that he took away 80,000 places. We have heard hon. Members talk about the cuts of £360 million earlier this year. Some £120 million has been reinstated, and now those 15,000 jobs will be reinstated at a cost of £34·9 million. However, we are not back to the level of funding that we had before the cuts were instigated.

Thirdly, we now have the greatest innovation in the Department of Employment since Lord Young of Graffham introduced Restart—executive job clubs. The Government have realised that it is not just Scotland, the north and the north-west which suffer from unemployment, and that the executive masses in the south-east are also suffering. I do not know what an executive job club will be, but I hope that it is more successful than job clubs have so far proved.

If there were one single issue that should excite those on the Government Benches, it is the cost of unemployment. The public know full well that the Government are not interested in unemployment as a social or regional issue, nor in its dramatic impact on the individual. This is supposed to be the Government of economic competence and sound money. If that is the case, why are they willing to spend £16·5 billion supporting unemployment? There is no dispute about the fact that £7 billion is paid out in benefits because we know it from the Government's sources and £9·5 billion is the cost of lost national insurance, income tax and indirect taxes. Are the Government seriously telling the country that they are willing to sustain 2·2 million people out of work at a cost of £16·5 billion? If they are, then they are obviously willing to play havoc with the public sector borrowing requirement as well.

The other tragedy is that in one year the Government added £4·7 billion to the cost of keeping people out of work. And that is the party of sound money—the economically competent party which threatens Britain by saying that if a Labour Government came in jobs would be lost, unemployment would be rife and employment growth would be affected. It is stunning hypocrisy that the Government can make such comments against their own record of abject failure on every key economic issue.

I want to give the Minister, whom I see smiling at me across the Dispatch Box, his allotted 15 minutes, so I will finish on this point. There is a yawning gap between the scale of the unemployment crisis facing Britain and the Government's pathetic response to it. When we win the next general election, we shall act; until then, it is time that the Government took unemployment seriously. If they did that, they would get more support in the country and some support in the House.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): I join the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) in the congratulations that he offered to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), the Chairman of the Select Committee, on the way in which he introduced the report. It is always a pleasure to respond to the hon. Gentleman. He is always well informed and constructive, even when he is in a critical vein, as he was tonight.

I particularly agree with the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) about the importance of training in the formation of skills. That is why the Government have increased spending on training and enterprise councils threefold in real terms during the past 10 years. We believe in training and we have been putting our money where our mouth is with our commitment.

On behalf of the Select Committee the hon. Member for Newham, North-East challenged the Government on the question of training targets, one of the three principal recommendations of the report. The Government believe in targets. It would be fair to say that we were responsible for the introduction of targets as an important managerial tool within Government. It is important to quantify the objectives of the organisations which work for the Government and within the Government.

But we do not believe in targets simply as a matter of gesture politics, to feel good by saying the right thing. We

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

take targets seriously. We believe that they must reflect a real commitment and responsibility, that they should be capable of being attained, and that the people for whom the targets are being set can attain them and will have the commitment to deliver them.

That means that the targets must be set by those who have a responsibility for fulfilling them. That causes a problem for the Government when it comes to setting targets for training. As the hon. Gentleman will know, most of the training done in Britain is not done by the Government, as is true in other countries. Employers are, generally speaking, the main sponsors of training. Therefore, it is employers rather than the Government who must take the responsibility for fulfilling training targets.

The Government welcome the fact that the CBI has taken that point. It has been looking at the question of targets and is making an effort to set realistic, attainable but stretching targets on behalf of employers which employers will be able to take responsibility for meeting. We await what the CBI has to say and what targets it sets, but the Government are pleased that, on behalf of employers, the CBI has responded to that challenge. The debate is not yet concluded, so I say to the hon. Gentleman —watch this space.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the report's second recommendation on the exchange rate mechanism. He was pessimistic about the implications of the ERM for unemployment and he was joined in that by my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) and for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler). As the hon. Member for Newham, North-East noted—in passing, it must be said —there is agreement between all the parties about the desirability of our membership of the ERM. It is supported by the trade unions and by business. That support includes the parity—if we are to understand accurately what has been said by the shadow Chancellor —of £1 to DM2·95.

Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friends are perfectly entitled to reflect on the possible consequences of the policy for unemployment. It may enjoy a sustainable consensus, but it may still have consequences to which my right hon. Friends are right to refer and to be concerned about. This is a large subject, so let me simply offer a few thoughts about the experience of France, to which the hon. Member for Newham, North-East particularly referred.

I do not necessarily agree with the basis of the hon. Gentleman's pessimism—the idea that Britain's experience of the exchange rate mechanism will parallel that of France. When we joined the ERM, inflation was lower, both in absolute terms and relative to that in the rest of Europe, than it was in France when that country joined in the early 1980s. Besides, our supply-side reforms and the labour market legislation that we have introduced have made our economy a great deal more flexible than France's economy was then.

Moreover, in the early 1980s France had devalued its currency several times to maintain competitiveness; or, at least, that was its intention. When it committed itself to the ERM, no one believed that devaluation had been ruled out, which increased the cost of getting inflation down.

There is a moral in that. We must maintain the credibility of our commitment to the ERM, with the parity that we have chosen. In that regard, I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent about the importance of training. He described very well the growing recognition that a sea change has taken place in that important part of our national life. One of the signs is the success of the training and enterprise councils. A huge voluntary commitment has been made by thousands of business people all over the country.

Over the decade, the Government have substantially increased the resources devoted to training; even more important, so have employers. As I have said, they are very much in the lead in that regard. The Government should also take credit for clarifying the system of qualifications, through the National Council for Vocational Qualifications.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent pointed out, a large amount of bumf seems to be inseparable from each of our education and training reforms. I shall refer what he said to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. I think that the House will agree, however, that there has been an important breakthrough, and that we now have a coherent vocational framework—not before time.

There have also been substantial policy innovations. I was pleased to hear what my hon. Friend said about training credits, an important development for which, again, the Government should take credit. My hon. Friend asked us to commit ourselves to spreading the system more widely across the country. I remind him that, in the White Paper that we published only a few weeks ago, we committed ourselves to the principle of a national extension of training credits from April 1993, and to completing the process during the next Parliament. We must, of course, learn from pilot schemes, but we consider that principle sound. In our view, it has already proved itself.

Mr. Leighton: Many weeks ago, I told the Minister that hundreds of young people in the borough of Newham had no jobs or places on youth training schemes. Initially, the Minister said that I was ill informed; having re-examined the position, I discovered that I was not. Then the Minister promised to write to me. I am still waiting for his reply. When will I receive it? Why on earth does he not answer? Is it because he was embarrassed to find that what I had said was correct, and that I was not ill informed after all?

Mr. Jackson: I am not sure that I said that the hon. Gentleman was not well informed, but, if I did, let me not compound my error.

It is difficult to establish the position relating to a youth training guarantee in a particular part of London. I signed a letter to the hon. Gentleman today, but I do not want to arouse false expectations: it does not solve the problem. Guarantees can be delivered by a number of providers, not necessarily located in the borough of Newham. However, we are taking the hon. Gentleman's point seriously, as he would expect us to. I can give him the basic assurance that he seeks: we are entirely committed to the youth training guarantee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock was right to argue against the establishment of a minimum wage. He was right to say that a minimum wage would not be an

effective weapon against poverty and that it would destroy jobs. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is being tutored in verbosity by the Leader of the Opposition. In his latest euphemism he has conceded:

"econometric models indicate a potential jobs impact."

We shall continue pressing the hon. Member for Sedgefield about his "econometric models" until he comes clean with the truth to which the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland was right to refer.

If the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland gets in touch with me about the constituency case involving the young lady in Inverness, I shall look at it with him and do my best to help sort it out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock was right to remind the House of what euphemisms such as econometric models having a jobs impact might mean for job opportunities in his constituency.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland on his willingness to make suggestions about how to handle the problem of unemployment. That is something we look for in these debates. His ideas about more spending on housing construction, education construction and energy efficiency are all worthy causes, but they all have substantial implications for public expenditure. The hon. Gentleman should consider the relationship between those proposals and his commitment to the stabilisation of exchange rates in the exchange rate mechanism. There is a tension there which I fear that the hon. Gentleman was not addressing. I draw his attention to the package of measures announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State—an additional £110 million this year and £230 million next year. That is a substantial addition to public expenditure to deal with unemployment. It is in the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. He must recognise that there are constraints on what we can do.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Jackson: I shall not give way because I want to continue to answer the debate.

I was concerned by what the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) had to say about the training provider organisation in his constituency with which he is associated and the decision that has been made by Mid Glamorgan TEC. The local TEC is much better placed than either I or my officials in Whitehall to make judgments about value for money and quality of different training providers. The hon. Gentleman must accept that. He implied that trainees who had been displaced from that provider were not being found alternatives. I shall take that seriously and I should like to discuss it with him afterwards. We must try to ensure that that does not happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South spoke about the rules defining self-employment. I have had similar experiences in my constituency and I share his concern. However, it is a matter for our honourable colleagues in the Treasury and I shall draw their attention to his remarks.

Unemployment is serious. It is serious for the country and the individuals concerned and there is no dispute about that between the Opposition and ourselves. We are equally concerned. However, the hon. Member for Fife, Central should not be allowed to get away with exaggerating. He said—I took down his words—that we have the worst employment record in Europe. That is not true. In May unemployment in Britain was 7·9 per cent. In Spain it is 15·8 per cent., in Ireland it is 15·5 per cent., in Canada it is 10·1 per cent., in Italy it is 10 per cent., in Australia it is 9·8 per cent. and in socialist France it is 9·3 per cent. Our record on unemployment is not as bad as others in the Community and the hon. Member for Fife, Central should recognise that.

The rhetoric of the hon. Member for Fife, Central was admirably punctured by an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock who asked him a simple and straightforward question. He asked what the Labour party would do about unemployment within the parameters of the policies that it has promulgated on the exchange rate and public expenditure. The hon. Gentleman's rhetoric is bankrupt. I see that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland is nodding in agreement, but the same stricture applies to him, because he, too, must live within the parameters of his policy.

There is general recognition in the House that there are no miracle cures for unemployment. We did not even hear a miracle cure from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), who gave us a mantra about socialism. No miracle cures were suggested in the report of the Select Committee and none has been advanced in the debate.

There is much agreement between the parties that inflation must be reduced, but we must recognise that the implication of doing that is a slow down in economic activity, which can translate into rising unemployment if wages are not flexible and if they do not reflect the decline in inflation. Our problem has been that wage settlements continue to run ahead of inflation.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).*

MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph 5 of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates), put the deferred Questions on Estimates and Supplementary Estimates, 1991-92 (Class II, Vote 5 and Class VI, Vote 1) and the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the other estimate appointed for consideration this day.*

CLASS II, VOTE 5

Resolved

That a further sum, not exceeding £910,873,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Overseas Development Administration under the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 on the official UK aid programme; economic assistance to Eastern Europe and the USSR; and global environmental assistance; including financial and technical assistance to governments, institutions, voluntary agencies and individuals; pensions and allowances in respect of overseas service including contributions to pensions funds; capital and other subscriptions and contributions, including payments under guarantee, to multilateral development banks and other international and regional bodies; emergency, refugee and other relief assistance; loans to the Commonwealth Development Corporation; and running costs, related capital expenditure and other administrative costs including for the Natural Resources Institute (an executive agency).—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Class VI, Vote 1

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £1,150,731,000 and including a Supplementary Sum of £90,392,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the

charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Employment, including expenditure via Training and Enterprise Councils, on training, including the provision of training programmes for young people and adults and initiatives within education; on the promotion of enterprise and the encouragement of self-employment and small firms; on help for unemployed people; the improvement of industrial relations; industrial tribunals; compensation for persons disabled by certain industrial diseases; payments towards expenses of trade union ballots; on residual liabilities and disposal of the remaining assets of the former National Dock Labour Board; on the costs of maintaining and disposing of the former Skills Training Agency; administration, central and miscellaneous services including assistance on employment issues to eastern Europe in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Class VI, Vote 2

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £276,560,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £17,514,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Employment Service of the Department of Employment on help for unemployed people, support for people with disabilities, assistance on employment issues to eastern Europe in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on research, publicity and on administration.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

PETITION

Kirklees Council

10.1 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I beg leave to present a petition that has been signed by more than 3,000 constituents. It asks the Secretary of State for the Environment to introduce legislation to replace Kirklees metropolitan council with at least two smaller district councils to administer the Greater Huddersfield area and Batley, Dewsbury and Spen valley.

Many of my constituents believe that Kirklees council is remote and that it ignores their needs. They also believe that Kirklees council neglects to invest in Batley and Spen. This is the first phase of what I suggest will be a larger petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Textile Industry (Kilmarnock)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell]*

10.2 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): My promotion to the Front Bench follows a military-style coup by Ayrshire Members, but it is temporary. Nevertheless, I welcome the opportunity to discuss an issue that is important not only for Kilmarnock but for Scotland and beyond.

The Minister is probably aware that Kilmarnock and Loudoun has the second highest number of textile and clothing employees of any constituency in Scotland. Therefore, you, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister will understand my deep concern for the industry's future and for the well-being not only of my constituents but of those in Scotland who work in the textile and knitwear industry and associated industries. Their futures have prompted the debate. As Kilmarnock is often described as a microcosm of Scottish industry, its case is indeed Scotland's case. I hope that the Minister will understand and accept that.

If the Minister has done his homework—I am sure that he has—he will know that the multi-fibre arrangement ends on 31 July. That date was chosen when talks commenced on the Uruguay round of the GATT negotiations in 1986. Those negotiations were expected to be successfully concluded by Christmas 1990 and, sensibly, a seven-month overlap was allowed for Governments to change their practices in line with GATT.

Inevitably, as the Minister will understand, problems arose and the Uruguay round of talks was halted. Those problems have now been overcome, and talks recommenced last month. However, the negotiations are months behind, and for that reason it is essential that the multi-fibre arrangement is extended for a further 17 months or until the results of the Uruguay round are ready to be implemented.

Our—and by that I mean Scotland's—lace, textile knitwear and clothing manufacture is of a high quality; I do not think that anyone in the House would dispute that. Therefore, it could easily hold its own in the world markets if the way were clear for it to do so and if the playing field were level. Even with the multi-fibre arrangement, there are many distortions which make fair competition extremely difficult—distortions such as South Korea's latest £2·5 billion subsidy scheme for its textile and clothing industry. O that the Minister were able to give one tenth of that to Kilmarnock and one half to Scotland.

Subsidies are also given by the Turkish, Belgian, French, Spanish and Italian Governments. Other countries employ other means to protect their home-grown textile industries, including excessive tariff rates, excessive import duties and even the prohibition of imports of textiles and clothing if similar goods are produced domestically. There is even a fraud facilitated by countries such as Taiwan and Japan to allow the registration of brand names, falsely implying a United Kingdom origin.

That list is by no means comprehensive, because we have only a short time to debate it, but it is a taster of the difficulties faced by the Scottish and, indeed, the British textile, lace and knitwear industries.

The hope of the industry, of my constituents and, I trust, of the Minister——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart) *indicated assent.*

Mr. McKelvey: —is that the Uruguay round of talks will remove the distortions which have led to many job losses and to many closures not only in my constituency, but in others in Scotland and in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Those losses and closures are evident from the fact that, in 1978, there were about 1,300 manual jobs in Kilmarnock's textile industry. In March this year, there were about 800. If one adds to those figures the clerical and external support and management jobs, hon. Members will understand why the industry believes that it has at best been ignored by the Government and at worst decimated by their inactivity.

Recently, two textile companies in my constituency closed with a loss of 200 jobs. We often hear of a mega-loss of jobs, so hon. Members might wonder why we should be concerned about the loss of 200 jobs. I am talking about small townships, where the loss of 100 or 200 jobs can decimate the economy because there are no alternative jobs. In some parts of my constituency, the loss of 100 or 200 jobs is equal to the mega-loss of jobs in other constituencies. Therefore, it is not surprising that the industry and its workers are highly nervous about the ending of the multi-fibre arrangement, the further distortions and frauds which could be unleashed and the subsequent effects in job losses.

The Minister for Trade has agreed to argue for a 17-month extension of the multi-fibre arrangement. I welcome that, and applaud his decision. However, it is feared that there could be a relaxation of the present arrangements, and I ask the Minister to use his good offices for such a good cause and to ensure that there is no relaxation. I invite the Minister to restate, if he can, the Government's commitment to the extension of the multi-fibre arrangement for either a further 17 months, as he has stated, or until the results of the Uruguay round are ready for implementation, whichever is the longer.

I also invite the Minister to support the current multi-fibre arrangement and to assure my constituents, the people of Scotland and the British textile industry as a whole that our negotiations will not allow any relaxation of the present arrangements. Furthermore, I would be pleased to hear the Minister's commitment to the extension of bilateral agreements with the European Community for a further 12 months after their current term has finished. I know that the Minister does not have responsibility for negotiating that, but his commitment to act from the Scottish Office on our behalf would be much welcomed by the Scottish people.

The existence of so many inequalities—despite the multi-fibre arrangement, which all of us support and which we so desperately require—has led to many job losses in my constituency. The manufacturers, the unions and the district council have tried for some time to seek interim solutions. Almost exactly one year ago, on 4 July 1990, I met the Secretary of State for Scotland. I was accompanied by Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council's economic development officer, Miss Jaqueline Cullen, the provost, Jim Mills, and Mr. McChristie, an officer of the General, Municipal and Boilermakers Union.

The Secretary of State said that a survey by the Scottish Development Agency was under way, and, although there had been some delay, he assured us that he would investigate to see whether the survey had taken place and that he would report back to us soon. I know that that is not the responsibility of the Minister, but the previous incumbent of the job said that he would report back to us.

However, in one year we have heard not a cheep about the seriousness of the situation in Kilmarnock, about the fact that the SDA was supposed to undertake that survey, or about what has happened since then. All we have heard about, through the auspices of Enterprise Ayrshire, was the recent launch of the Scottish lace brand logo. The lace industry's manufacturers got together to form themselves into an association. That is to be welcomed, but it involves a restricted group of people.

Since that time, my constituents in the industry have not stood still. Tom Smith, the managing director of the Loudoun Valley Manufacturing Company, said to me only today:

"As one of the principal manufacturers of the local valley for the past 30 years, I have never known trade to be so bad. The apparent lack of understanding shown by the present Government in not giving assistance and also the fact that cheap imports are coming into Britain is destroying the textile trade."

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I endorse every word that my hon. Friend has said so far. As he knows, my constituency used to be principally a mining constituency, but the largest sector of employment is now textiles, knitwear and clothing. That includes Kyle Knitwear and Cumnock Knitwear, which makes knitwear cards, Glenafton Textiles, which makes socks, Saracen, which makes nightdresses and other similar things, and Falmers, which makes the well-known jeans.

They are being squeezed by the MFA and unfair competition, with socks from countries such as Turkey, which is not an underdeveloped country, and knitwear from Korea and similar countries. They are also being squeezed by the recession, which is dampening down demand in the high street.

Would my hon. Friend urge the Minister, as well as dealing with Kilmarnock in his reply, to deal with Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and the problems of the knitwear and textile industry there, as he has been briefed to do? It would be useful if he could include that in his reply.

Mr. McKelvey: As usual, I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) for a helpful intervention. What he has said is correct. I have already told the Minister that I am not speaking only on behalf of Kilmarnock and all my colleagues from Ayrshire, including the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger). In reality, the debate not only extends to Scotland, but affects the textile industry throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Smith said that this was a trade that had existed in the Irvine valley throughout Kilmarnock for well over 100 years. He concluded:

"If there is not some help or assistance given in the very near future there could be no textile industry in this district."

We are now about the only manufacturers of lace in the United Kingdom, and we would not under any circumstances want to lose part of our somewhat recent heritage. The heritage of the knitwear industry in Scotland goes back rather further. We could afford to lose neither our heritage, nor the jobs, nor that part of the income of our economy.

[Mr. McKelvey]

Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council is now setting up a textile forum in my constituency, at my request. It will comprise representatives of textile industry management, trade union officers, representative councillors and council officers. The forum's aim is to seek some defence for the future of that worthwhile industry. It has already invited the European Commissioner for regional policy, Bruce Millan, to a meeting to discuss the problems and to ask if there is any possibility of European help either now, in the short term, or perhaps in the long term —in 1993, when the regulations change. It is hoped that some EC funds will be available to provide short-term pump priming for an industry that needs and deserves it.

If that were achieved, consumers would be able to compare like with like, and I have no doubt that the quality of the textiles, lace and knitwear not only from Kilmarnock but from the whole of Ayrshire, to Scotland and beyond, will secure the jobs and perhaps even allow the industry to expand and to gain back its lost jobs and its market position.

I hope that the Minister will support the initiative. I do not want promises such as those I received from his predecessor. To give someone a promise and then sit back and do nothing for a year is not acceptable. In fairness to the Minister, I have not encountered in my recent dealings with him such a laissez-faire attitude. I hope that he understands the seriousness of the problem. I shall look for total and enthusiastic support not only from the Minister but from his right hon. and hon. Friends in government, and an insistence on ensuring the survival of the textile, lace and knitwear industry not only in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire and the rest of Scotland, but throughout the United Kingdom.

We in Kilmarnock have set the ball rolling. The Minister has the ball at his feet. I want him to imagine a Hampden scenario. Will he seize the initiative? Will he rise to the challenge for which all Scotland is waiting? It is Scotland versus the rest of the world and the Minister has the ball at his feet. Will he take it in control? Will he swerve past the midfield, nutmeg the centre half, draw the goalie and slam the ball into the net to score the winning goal for Scotland? Will he bring the textile championship back where it belongs—north of the border? If he does that, he will have the support not only of my colleagues and myself, but perhaps of the whole of Scotland.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): Seldom have I received a more alluring invitation than that extended to me by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). I hope that I shall not completely disappoint him.

I offer my genuine congratulations to him on securing this Adjournment debate and on making an extremely well-informed speech. The fact that it was well informed came as no surprise to anyone who knows of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the textile industry in his constituency.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, too, on his temporary elevation to the Front Bench. I am sure that my fellow Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), will agree with me that we in the Scottish Office have never seen such a formidable Opposition Front Bench team as we see in the House this evening.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)——

Mr. Foulkes: On the Back Benches.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is on the Back Benches on this occasion, although not always. His interest in and knowledge of the industry are well established.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun was right to begin by recognising the importance of the industry not just for Ayrshire but for Scotland as a whole. It is one of our longest established manufacturing industries. The hon. Gentleman was also right to refer to its importance in terms of employment and output. According to the latest estimates available to me, its total work force is about 27,000 people and it represents about 5 per cent. of the value of the total output of Scottish manufacturing industry.

Many people do not realise the industry's importance as a major exporter ranking sixth, by value, in the league table of Scotland's export-oriented industries. The hon. Gentleman rightly told the House that the industry is as long established in Ayrshire as anywhere else—including Dundee—and it remains the most important manufacturing industry in the whole area. Approximately 16 per cent. of all manufacturing jobs in Ayrshire are in the textile industry. The figure is higher in some localities—in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, for instance, it is about 33 per cent.

As all Ayrshire Members frequently remind the House, Ayrshire is a large and varied area, and the textile industry is almost as diverse as the area. It comprises a multifarious group of industries engaged in the manufacture of lace, knitwear and hosiery, warp knitted goods, woollen and worsted goods and carpets, and in textile finishing and the manufacture of clothing. Diverse though it is, the textile industry in Ayrshire is characterised by two general features. The first is its success in exporting, to which I have already referred, and the second, to which the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun rightly referred, is the high quality of its products.

I recognise that there has been some contraction and loss of employment, but Ayrshire has not suffered so badly as most other textile manufacturing areas. I would go further—there are some real success stories in the Ayrshire textile industry, as I am sure Opposition Members would be the first to acknowledge. One of them is the Unitex company, a garment maker and manufacturer of knitted fabric which opened a factory in Irvine in 1989 and is about to occupy a second factory. It is a far eastern company whose decision to come to Ayrshire was influenced by an offer of Government assistance made through Locate in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun was right to emphasise the fact that, among the long-established indigenous companies, the Ayrshire lace manufacturers deserve a special mention. The industry has managed to achieve a significant increase in output and employement over the past five years, and the recent formation of the Scottish Lace Guild augurs well for the future of the industry. It was initially funded and

supported by Enterprise Ayrshire, and was launched on 21 May. If the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at my tie, he will see that the Scottish Lace label bears a thistle and a Celtic-style cross. *[Interruption.]* I can inform the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) that when I launched Scottish Lace I was given a tie but not a matching shirt. It is a significant and important initiative.

In that context, I will reply to the remarks of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun about what happened following his meeting last July with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, then Minister of State. I have a copy of the letter which was sent to the hon. Gentleman on 8 August as a follow-up to the meeting, explaining the position on the surveys to which he referred. If that letter has gone astray, as seems to be the case, I will of course let the hon. Gentleman have a copy for his record of the response following the meeting.

Mr. McKelvey: So that there is no mystery about this, if there was to be a survey and it was undertaken, what would happen to it? That is the mystery.

Mr. Stewart: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has recognised that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State responded to the point about the survey. Inevitably, the survey was substantially of a commercially confidential nature and was therefore discussed with the Scottish Development Agency. Discussions with the companies concerned led to the formation of the Scottish Lace Guild, to which I have referred.

With regard to assistance to the industry, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun will be aware that Ayrshire is an assisted area. Twenty four Ayrshire textile companies have received offers of grant totalling £2·6 million over the past five years. Ayrshire companies can of course also apply for help through the enterprise initiative consultancies, through a number of other Government-run schemes and through the Scottish exports office which is another ready source of advice.

I want to respond to the hon. Gentleman's questions about the work of Scottish Enterprise and Enterprise Ayrshire in the textiles sector. Scottish Enterprise has a team of people addressing the needs of the textile industry in Scotland. They are currently undertaking a review of the industry in association with all the local enterprise companies. It is hoped that the review will lead to a strategy that will help Scottish Enterprise to make the Scottish textiles industry more aware of the demands of the market, more design conscious, more adaptable to changes in fashion, and better trained. For its part, Enterprise Ayrshire is giving a high priority to helping the Ayrshire textiles industry in technology, marketing, training and environmental improvement. On the marketing front, Enterprise Ayrshire has already earned praise by helping to establish the Scottish Lace Guild to which I referred earlier.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun was right to refer to the important question of the international trade in textiles. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will study very carefully the detailed points that the hon. Gentleman made tonight. There are currently two main issues to be decided multilaterally. The first is the negotiation to turn the textiles trade to normal GATT rules as part of the wider Uruguay round.

It is worth recording that that sector has enjoyed protection for many years. In the case of the United Kingdom, the 1989 study by Professor Silberston commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry estimated that that cost consumers about £1 billion every year. All parties in the negotiation are agreed on the need to phase out the multi-fibre arrangement and we were close to agreement, as the hon. Gentleman recognised, last December on the terms for doing that over about 10 years.

Rightly, however, hon. Members and industry representatives lay much stress on the other side of the coin —that is, the need to strengthen GATT rules and disciplines and to improve market access to provide, among other things, fairer conditions for trade in textiles. The hon. Gentleman was right to raise that point. I can assure him that Britain and the European Community have consistently made it clear that all countries must accept adequate commitments in those areas.

That is a compelling reason for seeking to achieve the liberalisation of trade and textiles as part of a successful overall conclusion to the Uruguay round. Such an outcome would provide for improved access to others' markets, more satisfactory rules governing unfair trade practices, such as dumping and subsidies, and improved intellectual property protection. A satisfactory settlement was beginning to emerge last December.

The second issue follows directly from the failure to conclude the Uruguay round last year—that is, the need to extend the MFA for an interim period when it expires at the end of this month. I confirm that the European Community has proposed an extension until the end of 1992—the 17 months to which the hon. Gentleman referred—which would give our industry, our importers and our retailers the certainty that they seek. Agreement has not been reached on that, but I can give the hon. Gentleman the absolute assurance that the Government share his and the industry's desire that that issue should be settled as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 4 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*
Read the Third time, and passed.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 11 July.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Tuesday 9 July at Seven o'clock.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 May], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate further adjourned till Thursday 11 July.

Mr. Speaker: As the next two Bills have blocking motions, with the leave of the House I shall put them together.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 11 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Television Licences

1. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to introduce a progressive method of charging for television licences.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): We have no proposals to change the present methods of charging for television licences.

Mr. Skinner: The Government and the Prime Minister reckon to believe in a classless society—right? Yet some pensioners on one side of the street get free TV licences while some on the other side do not and some pensioners in warden accommodation get free licences while some in other warden accommodation do not. A rich pensioner living in The Savoy hotel gets a licence free, so I do not want the Minister to give me any of that crap about— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not an unparliamentary word, but it is distasteful.

Mr. Skinner: So I do not want any of that crap coming from the Government. If the Minister says to me, "Where is the money to come from?" I say, "Tax the Queen."

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman makes his usual point, but in slightly different words. As he well knows, the Government believe that the right way to help pensioners is through the social security system, not by complicated and bureaucratic adjustments to the licence fee. That is why pensioner rates for those on income support were increased by an additional £200 million in 1989 and a further £80 million earlier this year, over and above the increase in inflation.

Mr. Holt: Does my hon. Friend believe that we in the Conservative group of northern Members are getting good value for their television licences when they have been trying for months to get an appointment with the director general of the BBC, who finds himself too busy to meet us?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not believe that that point has any relevance to the question, unless it involves the collection of the concessionary licence fee. If so, that is entirely a matter for the BBC and I am sure that its management will see this exchange in *Hansard.*

Mr. Battle: Does the Minister accept that the rules on concessionary television licences seem to be arbitrary and a shambles because pensioners in identical housing and income circumstances, living next door to each other, may find that one has a concessionary licence and the other does not? They find that an unfair rule. When will the Government sort out the shambles?

Mr. Lloyd: The Government have sorted out the rules, which are crystal clear. If the hon. Gentleman read through them, he would find them easy to follow. The rules are that pensioners of more than 60 years of age in local

authority or housing association homes with their own secure border with a warden on the premises for more than 30 hours a week qualify.

Juvenile Crime

2. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is currently taking to encourage greater respect for the law in young people and to reduce juvenile crime.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): In addition to the widely welcomed Criminal Justice Bill, we are funding projects to tackle offending by young people through the probation service and the safer cities progamme, as well as encouraging junior crime prevention panels.

Mr. Coombs: I welcome those initiatives, but is my right hon. Friend aware of the overwhelming conclusions of the conference set up this week by the Institute of Economic Affairs and attended by Professor Halsey, one of my right hon. Friend's constituents, which links juvenile crime and delinquency with irresponsible parenting and the instability of families? Does he agree that the time is right for an initiative from Government for a code of parenting, which will not only point out to parents their rights and responsibilities, but give practical ideas on how to fulfil them?

Mr. Patten: I am delighted to hear of the late conversion to common sense of my distinguished constituent, Professor Halsey, for long a socialist guru in these matters. What my hon. Friend has said deserves the closest attention. Our most important job is to attempt to steer young people away from the temptation of crime in the first place. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently met the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Health and for Education and Science to discuss exactly the sort of issue to which my hon. Friend referred. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary hopes to make an announcement about this quite soon.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Does the Minister agree that for a depressingly increasing number of ever-younger people the first activity that puts them outside the law is under-age drinking?

Mr. Patten: It is one of the activities that do. Thieving by those under the age of criminal consent—nine—is another. In the last year for which figures are available 8,000 such acts were committed by those under the age of criminal consent.

I always listen with care to the hon. Gentleman. I would add to his analysis only the fact that the roots of the process of stopping young people turning to crime are to be found in two places: the family and schools.

Mr. Shersby: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most effective ways of preventing juvenile crime is for local authorities to provide adequate secure accommodation? Is he aware that one of the principal reasons why so many young people are able to re-offend is that they quickly abscond from their accommodation and then commit the same crimes again and again? Will he discuss these matters with the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Health?

Mr. Patten: We are doing that at the moment. I agree that in some parts of the county local authorities are, unfortunately, not keen on providing secure accommodation and although I think that some social workers are too often and too freely criticised, some of them, alas, in some parts of the country, are refusing their duty to keep young people under close surveillance. That in turn sometimes contributes to their going out and offending and then ending up in a real prison—and that is a mistake.

Mr. Winnick: Would not it encourage young people as well as others to respect the law if a notorous fascist agitator such as Le Pen was kept out of Britain? Why is that poisonous man being allowed in?

Mr. Speaker: Order. He is not a juvenile, so the point does not seem to arise.

Immigration

3. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to repeal the primary purpose rule; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I have no plans to repeal the primary purpose rule, which I regard as an important safeguard against abuse.

Mr. Janman: My right hon. Friend will be aware that if the Labour party was elected to govern this country it would do exactly what he has said that he will not do. Does he agree that if the primary purpose rule were abolished that would result in a massive increase in secondary immgration to this country which the British people would abhor? Does he agree that that would be disastrous?

Mr. Baker: The primary purpose test prevents abuse by those prepared to enter into marriage solely to settle in the United Kingdom. It continues to be our policy that genuine spouses should be allowed to join their partners in this country, but any objective person knows that marriage can be and sometimes is exploited as a route to settlement in the United Kingdom and that there must be some protective rules. We intend to retain them.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement that genuine cases will still be considered. Does he accept that those who abuse the rules and who, by playing the system, are allowed to remain in this country damage the cause of people who have genuine reasons for coming and who do not know how to get in?

Mr. Baker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Officers in my immigration service try to seek out those who abuse the rules who often, by so doing, keep others out. I remind the hon. Gentleman that about 27,000 spouses are allowed in each year, 7,000 of them from the Indian sub-continent, and that 2,500 are ejected. The rule by no means relates only to the Indian sub-continent. For example, it also applies to mail order brides from Thailand and the Philippines.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that any controls on immigration are bound to be resented by those who fall on the wrong side of them? None the less, strict controls are necessary so that the indigenous population is not subjected to massive new immigration. That is the precondition for good race relations.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend has put it very well. The rule is an important safeguard against abuse by those who are prepared to consider marriage as a device for securing admittance. My hon. Friend may recall that when a Labour Government were elected in 1974 they abolished the restrictions on spouses, but three years later they were so concerned about the numbers coming in that they introduced the marriage of convenience test, which is the forerunner of the primary purpose rule. I am disappointed that Labour now wishes to repeal that rule.

Mr. Darling: Does the Home Secretary accept that, while we must guard against abuses, it is absurd that a French citizen can enter this country with his non-EC spouse and their dependants under the age of 21 whereas a British citizen cannot marry a non-EC spouse without having to prove a negative under the primary purpose rule? Does not that absurdity merit some revision so that at least a British citizen and a French citizen are placed on an equal footing in this country?

Mr. Baker: That example does not lead me to the position of the hon. Gentleman's party—that one should scrap the primary purpose rule. If that was done, I am sure that marriage would be exploited, not only by people from the Indian sub-continent but by people in other parts of the world. It is prudent to retain the rule.

Prisons (Staffing)

4. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on staffing levels in prisons.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): At the beginning of June there were about 21,550 prison officers and just over 10,400 other staff in post in establishments. That represents 24 per cent. more prison officers and 22 per cent. more other staff than when "fresh start" was introduced in 1987.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware that Wakefield prison is still 23 officers short of the figure agreed under "fresh start"? Does she agree that it is worrying that the governor of that prison has said that next year could be the prison service's Armageddon because of staffing problems in prisons such as Wakefield? Do we have to wait for another Strangeways before we get proper staffing?

Mrs. Rumbold: There are 4,200 more prison officers than there were before the introduction of "fresh start" in 1987. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen to the facts rather than to his local prison officers. Wakefield prison has had a drop of about 13 per cent. in its inmate population and an increase of about 18 per cent. in its prison officer population.

Mr. Moss: Following my right hon. Friend's recent announcement of her wish to see sports facilities at prisons made available for public use—a change of policy which I heartily welcome in connection with the new Whitemoor prison at March in my constituency—does she foresee any implications for changes in staffing levels to accommodate that new policy?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is referring to the custom of prisons allowing people from the community to use their sports facilities. We welcome that and it is now common practice throughout the prison service. It has not necessitated more prison officers.

Mr. Sheerman: Does not the Minister realise that the director general of prisons action in effectively freezing staffing levels in April has led to deteriorating regimes in some prisons? The position is serious and the Government's mishandling of "fresh start" means that there are fewer officers on duty than there were before 1987. The Minister knows that there are deteriorating regimes in many of the prisons that are most likely to cause problems. In the spirit of Woolf, should not something be done to make sure that those regimes are improved rather than letting them go downhill rapidly? If action is not taken, there will be another crisis in British prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: I remind the hon. Gentleman that, as I said earlier, we have 4,200 more prison officers in the system. Prison officers work far fewer hours than hitherto because of the introduction of "fresh start". It is an excellent scheme which has greatly benefited both prison officers and the prisons.

I remind the hon. Gentleman also that, in his report, Lord Justice Woolf suggested to the Prison Officers Association that it should work hard to implement his recommendations. That must include working with headquarters and management to ensure that the best possible regimes can be introduced in our prisons.

Sir John Wheeler: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there would be even more prison officers available for duty at no extra cost to the taxpayer if there was a significant reduction in sick leave? Will she look at that part of prisons department management and examine the causes of sick leave and the administration of it, for the obvious benefit of the service as well as that of the taxpayer?

Mrs. Rumbold: It is true, as my hon. Friend said, that sick leave causes pressure in prisons. It is something which we are investigating with prison officers and governors to ascertain what can be done to minimise it.

Independent Television Franchises

5. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is planning any review of the new system of dealing with independent television franchise applications.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Mr. Grocott: Has the Minister not been advised by his officials—he certainly should have been—that it is the near-unanimous view of everyone who cares about broadcasting that the franchise allocation system is a complete and utter farce? Is he aware that one of the most damaging aspects of the system has been the loss of about 2,000 jobs—especially in the regions—and the loss of production facilities and skills, largely to London and the south-east, but, taken as a whole, throughout the industry? Surely the Minister owes it to us to undertake a thorough review of the system, to stop listening to advertisers and the Treasury and to start listening to viewers and programme-makers.

Mr. Lloyd: The proof of the tendering system for licences will be in the results of that process, which we have yet to see. I am encouraged that about 40 excellent

contestants have entered the ring. The hon. Gentleman's remarks about job losses in some independent television companies that are bidding should be set against the views of those who are responsible for the companies. If the hon. Gentleman spoke to them they would acknowledge that the time had come when it was necessary to run their operations more cost effectively. If the bidding system has helped to that end, that is one of its benefits.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is about time that we put all the television companies, including the BBC, on the same basis? Should not we consider in the next few years getting rid of the paraphernalia of the licensing system, detector vans and people being taken to court, along with all the other nonsenses that have been involved in raising finance for the BBC? Cannot the BBC stand on its own two feet along with all the other television companies?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is well ahead of herself. We shall examine the structure of the BBC when the charter comes up for renewal in 1996. I accept, of course, that the way in which the BBC will be financed is a matter of intense debate and interest. If we abolish the licence fee, I do not know what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will ask about during Home Office Questions.

Mr. Corbett: Does not the Minister recognise the potential damage to the quality and diversity of programming that the loss of thousands of skilled staff jobs and production facilities in every region is likely to cause under the mad and blind auction system? In the run-up to the new Channel 3, will he respond to a plea from the television companies to reconsider the Treasury take, which, under the levy system, is being unfairly inflated because of a decline in advertising? There are dire warnings about the inflated take jeopardising the ability of the companies to deliver on their programme promises.

Mr. Lloyd: On the contrary, the process of tendering ensures that each contestant company has to show that it has the resources, the management skills and the capacity to produce the programmes that it says will be produced so as to cross the quality threshold. The system underpins what the hon. Gentleman wishes to ensure.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is concern within ITV that some franchise applicants are still actively seeking financial backing for their bids and are now free to show the programme proposals of their competitors? Does not that undermine the integrity of the bidding process? Will he confirm again to the House this afternoon that the intention of the legislation was that applicants should have their programme proposals and business plans, soundly backed with finance, already in place when their applications were submitted?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Act requires bidders to show that they can carry out what they say they will do. Whether any additional piece of information is acceptable at a later date is entirely a matter for the Independent Television Commission, but I am sure that it will read what my hon. Friend has said about the matter and take note of it.

Phone Tapping

6. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many telephone lines on the same number an interception can be made when he authorises a warrant under the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The scope of warrants issued under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 is governed by section 3 of that Act. It does not specify the number of lines on the same telephone number which may be the subject of a warrant.

Mr. McFall: How many phone taps did the Home Secretary authorise last year? Does he agree that a court warrant should be obtained before each phone is tapped? Will he undertake to have a Select Committee consider the issue of phone tapping in general?

Mr. Baker: The figures are announced in the annex to the 1990 report of the Interception Commissioner which was published earlier this year. Some 515 warrants were in force on 31 December 1990 or issued during the course of the year and 68 were issued on the authority of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The Act requires that I issue a warrant only in particular well-defined circumstances and the use of that power is subject to review by the Interception Commissioner, who can look into the circumstances of each individual case. His report is published and is a public document, as this one was, and that is an appropriate and sensible method of regulation.

Shops (Unauthorised Occupation)

7. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to give local authorities greater powers to deal with unauthorised occupation of high street properties.

Mr. John Patten: The unauthorised occupation of any property is primarily a matter for the owner or lawful occupier of that property. I would be a bit cautious about giving local authorities greater power to deal with other people's property. But shop squatters who break the criminal law can be dealt with. I know that this is a matter of great concern to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Hannam: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the incidence of empty high street shops being occupied by unlawful traders is on the increase and that, as things stand, neither the local authority nor the police can evict them? It takes weeks and months to get hold of the absentee landlord in order to obtain a court action. Should not the Government do as they did with the hippy convoys some time ago and bring those squatters within the criminal law?

Mr. Patten: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has recently issued guidance about section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 concerning hippy convoys and others, and that has been widely welcomed. Those who squat in shops, use electricity, trade falsely and perhaps sell without declaring their VAT returns can be prosecuted under the criminal law. I encourage local authorities and owners of vacant property to use the expedited process through the county court which should make it possible to have squatters removed within about seven or eight days.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not just in the high streets where protection is needed from squatters? Does he recall the case of my constituent, Dr. Adam Fraise, who has had to spend some £4,000, including paying a large gas bill incurred by the squatters, to get his own home back? Does he agree that that is grossly unjust? My right hon. Friend told me that the Government were considering making unauthorised entry of a person's private home a criminal offence. When will he stop considering it and act?

Mr. Patten: I always take very seriously any injunction from my hon. Friend to act, as she knows. I know also how seriously she and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) view that issue. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is conducting a review, and he hopes to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Naturalisation

9. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for naturalisation are currently being processed; and what is the average time taken.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At 24 June 1991, there were 68,315 applications for citizenship outstanding. The average processing times for those certificates issued in May were 34 months for certificates of naturalisation, and 26 months for certificates of registration.

Mr. Evennett: The delays that my hon. Friend's reply reveal are naturally a matter of considerable distress and disappointment to applicants. When does my hon. Friend expect the process to be speeded up and the backlog to be cleared?

Mr. Lloyd: The process is speeding up, and the average waiting time has started to fall. In April, it was 36 weeks——

Mr. Corbett: Thirty six months.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is right—36 months. I expect the downward trend to continue—until, I hope, it is a matter of weeks. We are seeing the benefit of moving the nationality department to Liverpool, as the Government would like to create employment there. The staff have taken over the work quickly and effectively, and I believe that the waiting time will fall rapidly over the coming months—and weeks.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister might think that it is an amusing problem, but it is disgraceful that the waiting time has escalated. The Minister will know that the Select Committee on Home Affairs published a report last year that described a delay of 27 months as indefensible. The Minister will know also that I have reported him to the parliamentary commissioner over the delays in his Department. Does not the Minister realise that if it was any other Department, he would have been sacked by now? When will the Minister make available the resources necessary to clear the backlog immediately?

Mr. Lloyd: Of course I know that the hon. Gentleman has said those things, because he said them to me several times. I know also that the hon. Gentleman knows very well the reason for the backlog. In 1987, applications equivalent to six years' work were received. More than half of them came from applicants who had been in this country since 1973, and who therefore could have registered in any of those 14 years. Although the waiting list is being rapidly reduced, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that those applying for citizenship are already resident in this country and that there is no doubt of their right to be here—so the inconvenience caused to most of them is small, if real.

Policemen

10. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many policemen there were in post in 1979 and in 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On 31 December 1979, there were 113,309 police officers, which increased to 127,090 on 31 December 1990—a gain during those years of 13,781.

Mr. Evans: Does not my right hon. Friend's reply show that ours is the party of law and order? Is that not in stark contrast to the lot opposite, who would not condemn brutality in the 1984 miners' strike or on the Wapping picket line, or those Labour Members who refuse to pay their community charge? Is it not a fact that the Leader of the Opposition, who once embroiled himself in a fight outside his house, will, after the next general election, land flat on his back—as he did then, in a prickly hedge?

Mr. Baker: I am astonished at my hon. Friend's moderation in contemplating Labour's record. When we came to office in 1979, we found a police force that was undervalued, under strength, under-resourced, and underfunded. During the last 12 years, we have made it our first priority. There has been an increase in expenditure of 50 per cent., in real terms. As the shadow spokesman is not in his place today—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] It may be that he is bolstering up the Labour party in Liverpool. Whoever is in charge, perhaps he could get up and tell us how many more police officers Labour would recruit if, by any chance, Labour wins the next election.

Mr. Rees: If the present Home Secretary is so pleased about law and order, will he consider the fact that in 1979 the Conservative manifesto promised that the crime rate would fall, and that it would go on falling, but that it has gone up and up since then?

Mr. Baker: The crime rate would be even higher if we had not given high priority to law and order. Not only have we increased the size of the police force but we have increased the level of sentencing very substantially and we have brought in new crimes—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, we have brought in new sentences. We have also brought in heavier sentences for very old crimes. For example, we introduced life sentences for people who are convicted of attempted rape. I can assure the House that if we had not supported the law and the courts in this way, the level of crime would be even higher.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in parallel with the very substantial and welcome increase in the number of police officers, there has been a very substantial increase in public confidence in those police officers and their professional ability? Will my right hon. Friend also bear in mind that the thin stretch of police

—and their apparent invisibility, sometimes, on the beat —is causing concern in both rural and town areas? Will he ask the chief constables to look carefully at their policies, especially with regard to civilianisation, so that we obtain the maximum possible profile of individual policemen in front of the citizens of this country?

Mr. Baker: As well as increasing the number of uniformed officers by 13,000, we have increased the civilian force supporting the police by 15,000. We have civilianised many jobs, which means that more uniformed officers, both men and women, are available for policing on the beat and for policing in the community. That is another very important priority, but I am still waiting to hear from the Labour party what its increase would be.

Mr. Sheerman: Apart from introducing new crimes, the Home Secretary has been a member of a Government who have seen astronomic increases in crime rates—up by another 17·6 per cent. this year, announced only last week. Can he estimate how many more duties have been imposed on the police since 1979? Is it not a fact that although there has been a net increase in the number of police, the number of police where the public want them—on the streets, on the beat—has declined? When will the Home Secretary start to back the police of this country and give them the resources that they deserve to fight crime?

Mr. Baker: When we came into office, the police force that we inherited was under strength, under-resourced and undervalued. I was waiting to hear about the Labour party's priority. It has priority for all sorts of expenditure. The Leader of the Opposition is giving priority to education and to pensioners. What priority does he intend to give to the police? His spokesman has just refused to give a pledge to increase the number of police, so the Leader of the Opposition will have the chance to do so later. He may like to give it.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that however many police men there are in post, they need the admirable support of men and women who are working as special constables and volunteers? Can he announce today that he is planning further measures to support the excellent work that our special constables do?

Mr. Baker: I can give that assurance. There are about 15,000 special constables in the United Kingdom. We are undertaking a recruitment campaign to increase that number to about 25,000. I am glad to say that that campaign is well under way. Many young people, both men and women, are coming forward to serve as specials. Many of them go on to become full-time police officers. They make a very valuable contribution to the policing of our country.

Mr. Maclennan: Against the background of inexorably rising crime, does the Home Secretary really believe that his inane partisan bellowing enhances the reputation of the Government on law and order?

Mr. Baker: The essential element in improving law and order in Britain is to support the forces of law and order: our courts and our police force. We have an impeccable record in that as we have increased expenditure by more than 50 per cent. in real terms and we are committed to increasing it again in the lifetime of the next Government.

Prison Population

11. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison at the most recent count.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 3 July there were 45,037 inmates in prison service establishments.

Mr. Knox: I welcome the decline in the prison population over the past two years, but does my right hon. Friend agree that there are still too many people who are kept unnecessarily in prison? Has she any plans further to reduce the numbers?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that when the Criminal Justice Bill, which is currently going through the House of Commons and the other place, becomes an Act, it will effectively take measures to reduce the numbers of people coming into our prisons. I agree with him that that will be most welcome.

Mr. Madden: Is the Minister aware that one of the people in prison today is Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal who has been in Bedford prison since last August? Is she further aware that 59 Members of this House have supported early-day motion 828 which calls for his immediate release? Will she urge the Home Secretary to allow that man, who has lived in this country since 1974, the right to an independent appeal against the refusal to grant him political asylum, as he has extremely well-founded fears of persecution if he is forced to return to India?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is extremely difficult at the Dispatch Box to answer a question on a personal matter. However, I will take the matter back to the Home Office and I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Basildon Police

12. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chief constable of Essex to discuss police resources in Basildon.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has not met the chief constable of Essex for that purpose. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State intends to visit the Essex police on 27 November.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that a new police station in Laindon in Basildon will be opened next week? That means that we now have three police stations, instead of the one that we had in 1983. Will my hon. Friend accept the gratitude of my constituency for making money available for the three police stations? Does he also agree with the chief constable that it is not simply a matter of numbers of police men employed, but rather a matter of how scarce resources are deployed?

Mr. Lloyd: It is always essential that resources are used sensibly. I am glad that the Essex police authority has used the resources with which it has been provided to such good, practical effect. It is to be congratulated.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that his right hon. Friend, in the knock-about on police resources, should be ashamed of himself? When he meets the chief constable of Essex, if the chief constable asks for additional resources

for police officers in Basildon and in Essex as a whole, he will, I hope, not turn him down on funding, like he did in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Lloyd: My right hon. Friend always listens carefully to all representations made from whichever police force, but he takes the advice of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to give the ranking order to the bids that are put in.

Crime Prevention

13. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are using to engage further public support for crime prevention schemes.

Mr. John Patten: Encouraging the public to take an active part in helping to reduce crime is the main objective of the Government's crime prevention campaign, the most recent issue of which was crime prevention week. We shall be considering what further developments in the campaign are needed, but neighbourhood watch schemes are multiplying fast and numbers are now at record levels.

The safer cities programme will soon be up to its full complement of 20 projects, and other local projects are also being developed by Crime Concern, which receives a grant in aid from the Home Office.

Mr. Knapman: My right hon. Friend deserves the congratulations of the whole House on that excellent record. Is there any merit in handing over those excellent schemes to local authorities, and, in particular, will the schemes receive adequate support in areas still controlled by loony Labour councils?

Mr. Patten: I think that there is no merit at all in handing the schemes over to local authorities. Try telling the people of Lambeth or the people of Liverpool that there is. It is the same sort of ill-thought-out Labour idea that would put police forces under the control of regionally elected police authorities with complete political control. Such ill-thought-out ideas are the brainchildren of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who described his attitude to politics in the arts pages of *The Sunday Telegraph* last Sunday:

"I find the business of politics infinitely tedious."

Perhaps that is why the right hon. Gentleman has not bothered to turn up this afternoon.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 4 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is good news that strikes are now at a 30-year low and that, except for a few wretchedly greedy people in privatised monopolies, most people are now accepting wage restraint? Would not all that be upset by a minimum wage policy, which the trade unions and the next Labour Trade Minister have set and which would add two points to inflation and at least 600,000 to the unemployed? How can that be good for Britain?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. The recently announced record on strikes is excellent news, the figure having fallen to a very low level indeed. It is also extremely good news, particularly for those without jobs, that wage settlements are falling to a level that the economy is more able to bear. The economy could certainly not bear a minimum wage—not least in the west midlands, where, as the Reward Group pointed out just overnight, it would cost very many jobs right in my hon. Friend's own backyard.

Mr. Kinnock: When the Prime Minister supported the establishment of private water monopolies, did he realise that he was agreeing to the establishment of private monopolies that would turn out to be machines for printing money for their chairmen?

The Prime Minister: The share options to which I assume the right hon. Gentleman is referring—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]. If the right hon. Gentleman is really referring to salaries, I remind him that we have discussed that matter on more than one occasion and he knows very well that I disapprove of those salary increases, but it is not the policy of this Government to act to legislate upon everything with which we disagree, as would the Labour Government. That is the way to give maximum centralist control and that is why socialism is such an outdated philosophy.

Mr. Kinnock: Since privatisation, customers' bills have increased by an average of 30 per cent. and chairmen's salaries have gone up by 50, 70 and even 119 per cent. Against that background, does not the right hon. Gentleman think that the conduct of the private monopolies amounts to a public scandal?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to join debate with the right hon. Gentleman on utility prices. It was, after all, the last Labour Government who put up electricity prices by 2 per cent. every six weeks. Under this Government, electricity, gas and telecommunications prices have fallen.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister says that he condemns the huge salary increases. He does that in words, but, in practice, he actually condones them. If he says that he does not have the power to put right that which he says is wrong, why does not he get the power?

The Prime Minister: The difference between those of us who believe in a market economy and those who do not is that we recognise that it means giving people responsibility for their actions even if they exercise it in ways of which we do not approve. The right hon. Gentleman makes it clear once again that any prospect of a Labour Government means that they would seek to control the whole of the private sector centrally. We saw what happened when he did that last time and we know with his minimum wage policy what would happen again.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of compulsory competitive tendering for the provision of local services? Would not that be the best way of delivering that provision in Liverpool?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree. I think that compulsory competitive tendering in Liverpool, Lambeth and elsewhere would be very much in the interests of the people in those areas. The difficulty with the Opposition is that they do not know whether they support competition or not. In a recent interview, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said first: "I am against privatisation." Then, when he was asked why it was necessary in Liverpool, he said:

"Because the Liverpool people deserve a proper service."

If it is right in Liverpool, it is right everywhere.

Q2. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 4 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Patchett: After 12 years of this Government, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports today that Britain is at the bottom of the league for growth, employment and investment. Does the Prime Minister agree that if Britain were a football team, the manager would be sacked?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the hon. Gentleman, even the legendary Bill Shankly would be proud of a record that had us top of the European growth league through the 1980s and that is where we will be in the 1990s.

Mr. Pawsey: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent education speech yesterday? It underlines the difference between the achievements and intentions of this Government and the failures of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are very concerned about choice, diversity and standards. We have the policies to ensure that they improve.

Q3. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 4 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Prime Minister recall that when the Labour Government introduced equal pay legislation in 1974 there were a large number of Jeremiahs in the Tory party who predicted that equal pay would decimate the catering and retail industries and cost about 1 million jobs? Will the Prime Minister confirm that that did not happen? On the basis of that evidence, and following his criticisms, why will the minimum wage produce the same problems? Might it not, like equal pay, simply produce social justice in this country?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may be unwilling to take my views on a minimum wage, but he might consider the views of many external commentators, including yet another overnight—Phillips and Drew—which show that the first stage of Labour's policy would add 1 per cent. to the rate of inflation and destroy 400,000 jobs and that the second stage would add 2·5 per cent. to the rate of inflation and destroy 1·25 million jobs. Those are not my views, they are Phillips and Drew's. The hon. Gentleman might also ask the long list of Labour trade union leaders who also attacked the minimum wage policy.

Mr. Butcher: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the German secondary school system is still predominantly based on selection and that pupils are allocated, according to their ability, to technical schools, grammar schools or to high schools? At the heart of the system is the realschule or technical school. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in due course we, too, should have in every town in this country a state-funded technical school?

The Prime Minister: I certainly wish to see a very dramatic growth in the number of state-funded technical schools. There is no doubt—and it is most clearly illustrated by the demand from parents for places in them—that the city technology colleges have been an enormous success and will be a greater success in future. It is interesting that the Opposition deride a policy for which the parents vote with their feet.

Q4. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 4 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Michie: When will the Prime Minister wake up to the reality that, without a strong manufacturing base, there is no way in which we can compete with our competitors abroad, which means that the economic decline will continue, bringing poverty, homelessness, joblessness and hopelessness? Will he accept that he has no idea about how to stop the rot, and will he go to the country while we still have a nation and stop us being a sitting duck for overseas predators?

The Prime Minister: Everyone seeks to improve the position of manufacturing industry. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman when manufacturing was in decline—it was when the Labour Government lost control of inflation.

Q5. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 4 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Squire: Will my right hon. Friend consider tightening the law to protect those hon. Members who might otherwise be intimidated by the press? I refer to the *Liverpool Echo*, which has tried to force the hon. Members for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) to state which Labour party they are supporting in today's by-election in Walton.

The Prime Minister: That is certainly an ingenious proposition. I have been following the by-election in Liverpool with some interest. I was also interested in the answer given by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) when he was asked for whom he would vote. He replied

"I am not prepared to answer . . . a ballot is a secret thing."

And so it is. If the Leader of the Opposition is serious about Militant, he should start by withdrawing the Whip from the Militant members on his own Back Benches.

Mr. Loyden: The Prime Minister may be aware—he should be aware—that the problems facing Liverpool are deeply rooted in the policies that have been pursued by the Tory Government for the past 11 years. Does he agree that it is a pity that the Tory party did not pay the same

attention to Liverpool that it has paid it during the past week or two when it took £62 million out of the coffers of the city of Liverpool, thus causing the problems that exist there today?

The Prime Minister: The problems of Liverpool over the past 11 years are certainly deeply rooted, but which party—perhaps I should say parties—have been in control of Liverpool for the past 11 years? Why is Liverpool such a unique shambles? It is because the Labour party, whether under Militant control or, as it now likes to claim, under moderate control, has made a complete shambles of the lives of the people who live in Liverpool.

Q6. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 4 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholson: Given the tragic evidence this week of instability and uncertainty in eastern Europe and the continuing power of tyrants outside Europe, which is why Royal Marines from my constituency still remain in northern Iraq, will my right hon. Friend pledge that during the current reviews the Government will do all that they can to maintain the effectiveness and the morale of our armed services, which will ensure that the Conservative party can show strength on this issue, compared to the weakness of the Opposition parties?

The Prime Minister: I am entirely happy to give my hon. Friend that copper-bottomed assurance—and that applies both to conventional forces and conventional weapons, and to nuclear weapons. That is in sharp contrast to the Labour party with its policy of placing all Britain's nuclear capability into disarmament negotiations with the intention of eliminating it in concert with action taken by the super powers—in other words, Labour Members remain unilateral disarmers.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I wish that were true.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Prime Minister concerned that even after a period of recovery—whenever that might come—unemployment is predicted to rise to 2·8 million, and stay there? Does he intend to do anything about that, or will he simply abandon the unemployed to pay with their jobs for his failure?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) spoke more effectively about Labour's defence policy than his Front Bench does.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) well knows our concern about unemployment. He is aware of the mitigating measures that we have introduced, and he should be aware that the greatest single destroyer of jobs is inflation. We are getting on top of inflation and bringing it down, and I am not prepared to take short-term action that would cost jobs tomorrow. Our policy is to get inflation down to ensure that there is growth and also secure, sustainable, permanent jobs tomorrow in every sector of industry.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 8 JULY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Road Traffic Bill.

Debate on the fourth report from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) on computer services for Members on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 9 JULY—Opposition day (17th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition Motion entitled "Low Income and The Quality of Life".

Proceedings on the Arms Controls and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill [Lords].

Motion to establish a Select Committee on sittings of the House.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 10 JULY—Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Regulations.

Followed by motion on the Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order.

THURSDAY 11 JULY—Proceedings on the British Railways Board (Finance) Bill.

FRIDAY 12 JULY—Debate on the United Kingdom environment on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 15 JULY—Progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 10 July at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows:

Committee A—Document No. 4717/91 relating to environmental labelling scheme.

Committee B—Document No. 9791/90 relating to energy efficiency requirements for hot water boilers.

[Wednesday 10 July
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Document
4717/91 Ecological Labelling

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-xv (1990-91) and HC 29-xxv (1990-91)

European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Document
9791/90 Efficiency of Hot-Water Boilers

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-xiii (1990-91) and HC 29-xxvi (1990-91).]

Dr. Cunningham: Since summer has apparently belatedly arrived, can the Leader of the House at least give us one popular answer today and tell us whether he has decided when the House will rise for the summer recess? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I have instant popularity.

Can the Leader of the House confirm that, as a matter of policy, the Government have decided to stop publishing hospital waiting lists? Is not it strange that people can obtain all the information that they want about how hospitals can opt out of the national health service, but apparently they are to be denied information about the length of the waiting lists that they and their families will have to endure before they can obtain what is often quite urgent treatment? Is not that simply another device to hide the embarrassment of Ministers about ever-lengthening waiting lists for treatment under the NHS? May we have a statement on that from the Secretary of State for Health?

Can the Leader of the House arrange a debate in Government time on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report that was published today? Is not it sad for our country that that report shows Britain at the bottom of the league for growth, investment and job creation? In addition, and even worse, it shows Britain to be the only country in the European Community in the grip of such a bitter and damaging recession. Is not that an awful indictment of 12 years of the Government's failure in economic and industrial policy? Is it not incumbent on the Government to arrange for the House to debate those issues before we rise for the summer recess?

When they created large private water monopolies—some of which are providing captive consumers with a declining quality of service—did Ministers intend the chairmen and chief executives of those private monopolies not only to enhance their salaries hugely at public expense, but, effectively, to plan to make themselves millionaires within four or five years by giving themselves grotesque share options for which consumers will have to pay? May we have a clear statement from the Government—rather than the prevarications that we have had from the Prime Minister—about whether that was indeed their intention and whether they intend to allow such a state of affairs to continue?

Mr. MacGregor: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question, I cannot tell hon. Members today when the House will rise for the summer recess, much as I would like to. We still have a great deal of business to complete; we must also see how many amendments to Bills with which we have already dealt are introduced from the other place. I hope, however, to be able to give some indication of the date in next week's business statement.

As for hospital waiting lists, the hon. Gentleman will know that we are to hold a debate on that very subject later today. Given that it is being discussed today—earlier even than next week—it would surely be appropriate for hon. Members to make their points at that stage. The hon. Gentleman will also know, however, that in the past 10 years the number of both in-patients and out-patients treated in our hospitals has risen substantially.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the OECD report. A number of the matters to which he referred could have been raised yesterday evening, when the House debated employment.

Dr. Cunningham: We want a debate in Government time, not Opposition time.

Mr. MacGregor: Yesterday's debate was in estimates day time. The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong again.

I suspect that it will also be possible to raise a number of those matters when we debate some parts—certainly Third Reading—of the Finance Bill.

As my hon. Friend the Prime Minister said a moment ago, the 1980s record shows that in many of those years this country was at the top of the European Community

growth league. Industrial investment has grown substantially in recent years. I am confident that, as our policies on inflation work through, we shall be able to achieve the same record in the 1990s.

As for the hon. Gentleman's last point, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dealt with it very effectively just now. It is interesting to note, in this regard as in many others, the way in which the Opposition react the moment anything happens that they do not like. They have produced the same answer yet again: they want to introduce legislation to control, interfere and direct.

Dr. Cunningham: That is what Government legislation does.

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Gentleman is not talking about some form of interference, I do not understand the questions that he has been asking. The plain fact is that the Opposition's gut reaction is always to control, direct and interfere in industries that they do not really understand.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House faces the same difficulty as was experienced yesterday. Business questions are to be followed by an important statement, which will put considerable pressure on the debates on the steel industry and hospital waiting lists. I must therefore limit business questions; at 4.10, we shall move on to the statement on Hong Kong. I hope that we shall be able to spend half an hour on that before reaching the main debates. May I ask hon. Members who are not bursting to ask a business question to delay their questions until next week?

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): In view of the current tragic events in Yugoslavia—the position may worsen, although we all hope that it will not—and the disturbing developments in the Soviet Union, notably the tragedy of the Baltic states, is not there a strong case for a debate on foreign affairs to be held before the House rises for the summer recess? Will my right hon. Friend consider that request?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely understand my right hon. Friend's point, especially in view of the seriousness of the situation in Yugoslavia.

In view of the extreme pressures on our timetable, and the clear wish of hon. Members for the House to rise at a reasonable time so that they can be with their families, I do not think that a full day's debate will be possible. I can, however, give my right hon. Friend a clear undertaking. As he knows, my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary made a statement on Yugoslavia in the House yesterday. I am sure that he will want to ensure that the House is kept fully informed of developments, as appropriate.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As a former Minister of Agriculture, the Leader of the House will be well aware of the profound implications for British agriculture of the recent proposals of Commissioner MacSharry for reform of the common agricultural policy. Is there any way in which Members of the House could have details of those, and is there a proposal for a statement or debate on them before the recess?

Picking up on the point that the Leader of the House made on last night's debate on employment, the *Official Report* shows that the official Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), said that he would have liked to have told the House about the Labour party's policy but did not have time. Will the Leader of the House make time available? It would not take long.

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's second point. It is significant that, on that issue and others, Labour Front-Bench Members somehow manage to run out of time when they reach the point of detailing some aspects of Labour's policies. There has been endless probing on one particular unemployment policy and that is the national minimum wage. There is clear concern in the House and the country about the damaging effects of that policy and we simply have not had answers about it.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point in relation to new proposals to reform the CAP, I have not yet seen details. There have been a number of leaks about what the proposals are likely to amount to. I shall certainly try to ensure that the House is informed of them when they are available. As the hon. Gentleman will know, there will be prolonged and detailed negotiations on the proposals and we need to consider when would be the most appropriate point for the House to express its views. The House should be in no doubt about the Government's view. Those aspects that we believe are not in the interests of the long-term competitiveness and viability of agriculture, and certainly not in the interests of British agriculture, will be strongly opposed by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the defence White Paper is due to be published tomorrow. Although I understand that there cannot be a debate in the House next week or before the House rises, in view of the imminent butchery of the British Army, will he assure the House that when the matter is debated—after the recess—we shall be allowed a full two days' debate so that the whole House can let the Government know of its extreme reluctance to let those measures go through?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that the White Paper will be published tomorrow. However, in the light of all the changes that have taken place in the past year, the Army authorities are currently considering the proposals. My right hon. Friend will make a decision and, if appropriate, a statement on that matter before the House rises. As for the debate, we shall have to see what the overall timetable and programme look like.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it be possible for the Home Secretary to come to the House and make a statement as soon as possible on why it was decided to allow a meeting to take place today in London of right-wing extremists promoting racial hatred in defiance of existing legislation in Britain? Bearing in mind this island's position in the war against Nazism from 1939-45, why should a notorious fascist agitator like Le Pen, with all his poison, be allowed in?

Mr. MacGregor: If the published views of the person concerned are correct, our views and those of most people in this country are clear: we totally reject the views of Mr. Le Pen. However, to ban his entry would be an extreme step, given his position as an elected member of the European Parliament and the French National Assembly. There seems to be no evidence to justify exercising the powers to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): May I once again draw the attention of the Leader of the House to two early-day motions, Nos. 518 and 556——

Mr. Speaker: Only one, please.

Rev. Ian Paisley: No. 518 is signed by over 200 hon. Members and concerns the imprisonment of four former members of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

[That this House views with concern the recent Newsnight exposé of serious flaws in the evidence which led to the conviction of four members of the Ulster Defence Regiment; and calls upon the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to have the case referred to the Court of Appeal.]

Is he aware that new evidence has come to light, that the Secretary of State has had it presented to him, and that the police have now announced that they have referred the matter of police inquiries at the original trial to the Director of Public Prosecutions? Will he arrange for a statement or a debate on the issue in the House before the House rises, or are the four young men to languish in prison during the recess without having their cases reheard?

Mr. MacGregor: As I understand the position, the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has been asked to conduct further inquiries into a number of matters in relation to that case—the process will inevitably take some time. I do not know whether it would be appropriate for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make a statement at present. I am not sure what stage has been reached, but I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend. I should like to check, but it may be appropriate to raise the matter in the second of the debates on Wednesday.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): How is it possible to justify setting up a Select Committee on sittings of the House for the convenience of 650 people down here, but not setting up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which is a necessity for 5 million people north of the border? Is the Leader of the House aware that we would like a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs so that we could bring the Prime Minister before it to be examined on a letter that he wrote on 4 June to the Dalzell shop stewards giving them support for investment, while simultaneously the Secretary of State for Scotland was sitting in Bob Scholey's office being told that Dalzell was to close? Was that duplicity or incompetence? Is not that precisely the sort of thing that we should examine?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows well the position on a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs and why it has not been possible to make progress in this Parliament. He also knows that the Scottish Grand Committee has met a number of times recently to consider many Scottish measures, and that steel issues are the subject of a debate this afternoon, so there are plenty of opportunities to debate those matters.

The hon. Gentleman referred to 650 Members here, including himself and colleagues from Scotland. I think that there is a strong desire in all parts of the House for a Select Committee to be established, start operating and have its first meeting before we rise for the summer recess so that much of the preparatory work can be done. That is why I propose that we should deal with that issue next week.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I wonder whether the Leader of the House, as a Scotsman, will arrange for a debate on employment—not unemployment—in Scotland so that we can rejoice in the fact that there are tens of thousands more Scots employed in Scotland than there were when we came to office. They are doing a good job and making it a prosperous country—no thanks to the Labour party.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. What we have seen in Scotland is a successful illustration of the restructuring of an economy from old industries to new ones, with a substantial emphasis on new industries of the future. As for my hon. and learned Friend's concluding remarks, in Scotland as elsewhere policies such as the national minimum wage would undoubtedly retard that programme.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that there is absolutely no reason for rejecting compensation for non-haemophiliacs who have been infected with HIV as a result of contaminated blood transfusions because they face exactly the same critical, fateful illness and suffer the same appalling consequences? As they are dying regularly, may we have an urgent debate on the matter next week?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not think that it will be possible to have a debate on that next week, but before long I shall arrange a debate in which many matters may be raised on the Floor of the House.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Would my right hon. Friend kindly answer one question on Monday evening's business, the Road Traffic Bill? I understand that in the House of Lords a new clause has been introduced to the Bill which we shall be discussing on Monday evening. As my right hon. Friend will know, 192 Members of this House signed early-day motion 667, which called for the convictions of applicants for taxi drivers' licences to be examined beforehand.

[That this House notes with grave concern the findings of a survey by the National Association of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing and Enforcement Officers which revealed that in the 136 councils that replied 486 criminal records had actually been discovered in an 18 month period, none of which had initially been declared during the interviews which took place under the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 which required a district council not to grant a licence unless they are satisfied that the applicant is a fit and proper person to hold a taxi driver's licence; calls upon the Home Office, the Department of Transport and the Association of Chief Police Officers to co-operate in the release of past criminal records of all new applicants to the chairmen of district licensing committees in a confidential file, so as to prevent any recurrence of what occurred in Southampton where a licence was given to a convicted rapist; and calls for a similar system to be introduced as that practised in London where the Metropolitan Police have access to criminal records when determining applicants for Hackney carriage driver's licences to be expanded to all district councils in the United Kingdom.]

I congratulate the Government on that. I certainly look forward to Monday evening's debate in which, if I catch

Mr. Speaker's eye, I shall be delighted to take part. But is my right hon. Friend allowing enough time to discuss this praiseworthy Government move?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that there will be time on Monday, because we shall take all the amendments then. As a result of the consultation promised when the Road Traffic Bill was considered in another place we shall introduce on Monday a new clause meeting the anxieties expressed in the early-day motion to which my hon. Friend referred. In doing so we are responding to pressure from colleagues in the House who have been making good points about the matter—not least my hon. Friend, who has raised it on many occasions on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Would the Leader of the House agree that, at a time of increasing recession and of small businesses going into bankruptcy, and at a time when, despite interest rates falling, bank rates charged to customers have not fallen, there should be a debate before the House rises for the summer on the actions of the four clearing banks as they affect small businesses and personal accounts? Is it not a disgrace that the banks seem to be increasing their profits while other people are being sent into bankruptcy and ruin?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has discussed these matters with the chairmen of the clearing banks and will no doubt come to a conclusion on those discussions. I do not know whether it would be appropriate to discuss this matter at length in the House given that we have a large number of other issues to deal with, but I think that there may be one or two occasions in the near future when it will be possible to raise these matters. The Government's interest and involvement in them is well known.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): Could my right hon. Friend expand on the answer that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames)? When the White Paper is published, many Conservative Members will want crtically to examine these drastic proposals in considerable detail. Will my right hon. Friend consider—unusually—allowing three days for this important debate, preferably before the House rises at the end of this month? Will he confirm that no administrative decisions will be taken in the Ministry of Defence that will pre-empt the decision of the House on that White Paper?

Mr. MacGregor: There is a distinction between the White Paper, which is the usual document on defence, and the points to which my hon. Friend refers, which concern the reorganisation of the Army and the reduction in its numbers as a result of the very different situation in Europe. That change is also reflected in the considerable reductions in numbers in the armed forces of all the other NATO countries.

In due course we shall have the usual debate on the White Paper. I have noted my hon. Friend's point on what is a separate issue, but I cannot promise him a debate before the House rises, although I shall consider that. The timetable is extremely crowded already if we are to rise at a reasonable date before we get well into the holiday period.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Should not there be an early debate on the criteria applied by the Home Office when deciding whether to permit the entry into this country of people with criminal records—*[Interruption.]* The former Home Secretary should not groan: this is a real problem. Does the Leader of the House know that Mr. Le Pen was recently convicted of incitement to racial violence and fined the equivalent of £90,000 for that? I know that he will agree that this man's views are odious, but why will he not also agree—if Le Pen is not to be thrown out of this country, as he should be, and forcibly returned to France, whence he should never have come—that the sooner this man returns to France the sooner we can all rejoice——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This should be a question to the Leader of the House——

Mr. Janner: I asked the right hon. Gentleman whether he agreed with me that this man should be slung out——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a point for business questions.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that I have already dealt with the matter.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Did the Leader of the House note that in the excellent debate on Europe in Government time last week 49 hon. Members put their names down to speak and only a handful of non-Privy Councillors were called? Given the considerable importance of the subject and the huge majority of 154 with which the House sent the Prime Minister to Luxembourg, which must have helped him in his negotiations, will the Leader of the House take soundings to see whether we can have more time, preferably a couple of days, so that the foot soldiers may have their say? That would help, as did last week's debate, to emphasise the emptiness of Labour's policies on Europe.

Mr. MacGregor: I wish that I could exercise what used to be my magical skills in fitting the enormous amount of business into the time available while at the same time taking account of the feelings of many hon. Members about House rising times. That was one of the problems that we faced in last week's debate on Europe in which many hon. Members wished to speak. The Select Committee on Procedure is currently considering whether the 10-minute limit on speeches could be extended. That would be one way of allowing more hon. Members to speak in debates. I gave evidence to the Committee yesterday and look forward to its report, which I hope will be published shortly. It is always difficult to judge how many days should be allowed for a debate. Sometimes a long period is allocated and there are not enough speakers to fill it. My hon. Friend was right to say that last week's debate showed the overwhelming support for the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary for the way in which they were conducting negotiations. A significant contribution to that debate was the excellent speech by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week by the Secretary of State for Health on the proposed closure of the baby unit at St. Luke's hospital in Bradford and on the £5,000 performance bonus to the manager of Bradford national health service trust for his performance in closing such facilities, cutting other services and sacking 300 people? Is it not outrageous and wrong that such an important facility as the baby unit, which serves a large

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

part of Bradford, South, should be in jeopardy as a result of the Government's policies being carried out by puppets on Bradford NHS trust?

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly, I am not in a position to comment on the hon. Gentleman's allegations, but I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): In respect of the package of measures to facilitate our work in the context of the European Community, will the Leader of the House explain what has happened to the one portion to complete the package—the envelopes that we are supposed to use to write to designated institutions? They seem to have been delayed and I think that they were promised in early June.

Mr. MacGregor: There does seem to be some hold-up on that. I do not have an up-to-date report, but I shall look into the matter. What we have agreed to do is clear.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement before the recess on the progress of the GATT talks? Is he aware that the scars of recession are clearly seen in the textile industry? There has been a 14 per cent. reduction in employment in the wool textile sector and massive redundancies and short-time working in many areas, including Bradford. Employers, trade unions and the whole industry want a clear commitment that the multi-fibre arrangement will be extended to the end of next year. Will the Leader of the House arrange for that assurance to be given as soon as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have discussed progress on GATT on many occasions. It is clearly our desire to seek a successful outcome to the current talks. We are well aware of the textile industry's wish to minimise uncertainty and of the need to agree arrangements about the future of international trade in textiles before the current MFA expires this year. The hon. Gentleman will know, because he has spoken about it before, that the European Community has proposed an interim extension of the current multi-fibre arrangement to the end of 1992, which is what the hon. Gentleman seeks. I am sure he will agree that in the longer term a successful GATT settlement encompassing strengthened rules and disciplines will best serve the textile industry's interests. I am not sure whether it would be appropriate to go beyond that and arrange for a further statement before the House rises. I hope that the proposal for an interim extension reassures the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): May we have a statement next week about the aims of the Government's citizens charter so that the House may clearly understand that the Government wish to restore responsibility to individuals? We may then compare that fact with the Labour spectacle of a comrades charter which would effectively return responsibility to the union barons.

Mr. MacGregor: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. When we announce the full charter, I think that the contrast will be clear. I cannot say now exactly when a statement will be made.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The current issue of "Population Trends" of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys shows that there are 1 million people missing from the electoral register in England, Scotland and Wales. Many of the missing people are 18-year-olds. It would be a disgrace to go into a general election without there being a full discussion about the democratic and constitutional implications of the loss of so many people from the electoral register. Numbers have fallen during the operation of the poll tax. I have asked the question for the past two weeks and I hope that the Leader of the House will not tell me to find other methods of raising the issue. Indeed, I have raised it incessantly over the past three years. It is time that the Government faced the issue.

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add to what I said last week. I repeat that it is open to the hon. Gentleman to use the many opportunities that present themselves in this place outside Government time that enable hon. Members to raise issues that concern them. I think that he might look in that direction rather than to raise the matter again next week during business questions. If the hon. Gentleman raises the matter with me next week, I assure him that I shall give him the same reply.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): In view of the Irish triumph thus far announced in relation to the talks yesterday, will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that there will be a statement about the better government of Northern Ireland soon, as Northern Ireland is a constitutional sham? At the very least, let us have a statement that the truly scandalous procedure of, for instance, reforming the criminal law in Northern Ireland by the procedure of Order in Council will be stopped and that the proper rights of the minorities in Northern Ireland are dealt with by using the procedures of this place in a proper and orderly way.

Mr. MacGregor: There are a number of occasions when Northern Ireland matters can be raised. Indeed, there will be opportunities to raise them next week. I shall discuss the matter that my hon. Friend has raised with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made next week about the need for a public inquiry into the level of dioxin in milk in north Derbyshire and the Bolsover area? He promised last week to call upon the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement, but none has been forthcoming. I called for compensation for the farmers involved, who have suffered loss of livelihood, but the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has refused to allow it to be paid. Will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friend again to make a statement? Many in north Derbyshire are alarmed that two farms were involved and that 27 others were monitored, many of which had high dioxin levels as well.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I gave a fairly full reply to his question last week. I shall take up the matter again with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): In view of the immense irritation of my constituents on being requested to pay an additional community charge for no

better reason than that some of their fellow community charge payers evaded paying the charge last year, will my right hon. Friend ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment at least makes a statement in the near future to reassure us that local authorities are not taking the easy way out and surcharging law-abiding citizens while failing to exercise all the freedoms that are open to them to take non-payers to court?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that it is necessary for my right hon. Friend to make a separate statement on that point because we agree with the point that my hon. Friend has made. All charge payers are under a legal duty to pay the community charge and local authorities have strong powers to enforce payment. It is for local authorities to make full use of those powers. We have on many occasions in the House condemned those who do not pay their community charge.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman present for the business statement?

Sir Russell Johnston: No, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: In that case, in fairness, because of the limit that I have imposed, I cannot call the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): As we can find time next week to discuss such an esoteric yet mundane subject as boiler regulations from Europe, can we find a little time before the recess to talk about the domestic arrangements in this place, particularly the allocation of the new rooms which are coming on stream? If that is done in the usual way through the back door, by the old boy network or by Buggins' turn, a lot of boilers will be boiling over among my colleagues on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has made her heated views on the matter known. The boiler regulations are being debated not on the Floor of the House but in Committee and I suspect that it might be better if the issue that she raises was pursued in other ways than in a debate on the Floor of the House. However, I am sure that her point will have been noted.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will ensure that those hon. Members who have not been called this week will be called reasonably early at business questions next week.

Hong Kong

4.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Hong Kong.

The British and Chinese Governments this morning issued a joint statement about the result of intensive discussions over the last few months on a new airport for Hong Kong. Sir Percy Cradock, the Prime Minister's personal adviser on foreign policy, visited Peking from 27 to 30 June for meetings with Chinese leaders and officials. Agreement was reached on the Hong Kong airport project, and the two sides initialled a Memorandum of Understanding. This will provide a firm basis for building a modern airport to serve the expanding needs of Hong Kong and the future special administrative region. The Chinese and British Governments confirm their wish to deepen their co-operation over Hong Kong within the framework of the joint declaration and their confidence in the future of the territory as an international economic, financial, and trading centre.

The statement was released this morning, because of the time difference with Hong Kong.

The text of the "Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Construction of the New Airport in Hong Kong and related Questions" has been placed in the Library of the House. The Chinese Government have invited the Prime Minister to visit China, and he looks forward to doing so soon, and to signing the understanding on that occasion. It will come into effect on signature. In the meantime, the Chinese Government have assured us that they will raise no objection to the Hong Kong Government proceeding with the most urgent work relating to the airport.

Much work remains to be done if we are to ensure a smooth transition in 1997 and to give the Hong Kong special administrative region the best possible basis for success after that. The Chinese Foreign Minister has agreed to the proposal which I made in April, that in future we should meet twice yearly to discuss Hong Kong and other questions. The meetings between the Governor and the senior Chinese official dealing with Hong Kong in Peking are also being put on a regular basis.

The conclusion of this understanding ends months of uncertainty about Hong Kong's airport project and settles an undoubtedly difficult problem in our relations with China. The Chinese Government have expressed in the clearest possible terms their support for the airport project and have undertaken to provide clear assurances to investors.

I am grateful for the invaluable advice which the Governor of Hong Kong and his advisers in the Executive Council have provided throughout the discussions. The Government believe that the outcome will be generally welcomed in the House, in Hong Kong and more widely. It should provide a fresh impetus to international confidence in the continuing success of Hong Kong.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The officials concerned deserve credit for negotiating a useful agreement which removes doubt over a project which is of great importance to the future of Hong Kong. It is also right that there should be proper consultation on other

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

issues which genuinely straddle the remaining period of British sovereignty over Hong Kong and the period beyond transfer of sovereignty to China.

It is, however, important that the concept of straddling should not be stretched to cover all other issues relevant to Hong Kong over the next six years. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that the agreement is the only one of its kind that has been made, or is under discussion, and that if other agreements are to be discussed, the House will be informed of them in advance?

Can the right hon. Gentleman also give an assurance that the appointment of judges to the Court of Appeal remains the sole prerogative of the United Kingdom Administration in Hong Kong? Will he further assure the House that a decision on the Bill of Rights and progress on democracy in Hong Kong will rest solely with the United Kingdom Government and the colonial administration?

It is right and sensible that the maximum possible cordial and constructive consultation should take place over Hong Kong with the Government of the People's Republic of China, but it is important to reassert—as the Government have constantly asserted—that until midnight on 30 June 1997 the sovereign power responsible for Hong Kong and its people will remain the United Kingdom Government, responsible to this Parliament.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's general tone. The Memorandum of Understanding, which is in the Library, sets out the total extent of our understanding with the Chinese Government in respect of the airport project. There are no secret annexes, papers, or agreements arising out of the airport negotiations.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the joint declaration provides for a Joint Liaison Group, which exists to thrash out practical problems that arise from time to time. There will be continuing discussion in that group on the various matters, such as questions of land sales, that regularly come before it.

In April, I was trying—and I hope that this can be achieved—to push forward the impetus of that work, so that a backlog of unresolved matters does not pile up in the way that occurred recently.

As for judges, no changes are envisaged to previous practice, which will be maintained as in the joint declaration.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I apologise to the House for making a miscalculation over business questions, and ending them five minutes earlier than I stated that I would do. I will therefore give a free kick to those hon. Members who were not called during business questions, without any prejudice against them next Thursday.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State aware that those who are concerned with the welfare of the people of Hong Kong will wholeheartedly welcome the ability of my right hon. Friend and his colleagues to negotiate a satisfactory agreement?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that projects that cross 1977 are clearly covered in the 1984 agreement, but that we would be well advised to ensure, in everyone's interests, that where such projects are initiated there is the fullest consultation not only in Hong Kong but with the Chinese Government as well?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best interests of the people of Hong Kong are served when there are good relations between the British Government and the Chinese Government? In that regard, will my right hon. Friend accept my assurance that those who are concerned about that aspect will wholly welcome the news that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to visit China, and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have twice-yearly meetings with his counterpart?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that we are back on course, in co-operation with China, in carrying out the joint declaration. It states that, in the second half of the period up to 1997, there will be a need for closer co-operation, which will be intensified during that period. At the same time, the joint declaration recognises—as the Chinese Government have publicly reaffirmed—that, until then, the Hong Kong Government retain the authority to administer Hong Kong effectively. Those are the two principles, and if right hon. and hon. Members study the Memorandum of Understanding, they will see that they are thoroughly carried through in what has been agreed.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that it is a pleasure to be in a position to congratulate the Government on the outcome of the negotiations, and also Sir Percy Cradock, who played an important part in those negotiations? Will he convey to the Prime Minister the fact that many people feel that, when he goes to China, it would be desirable that he should tell the Chinese Government that there is considerable unease in Hong Kong about the future of free expression post-1997 and that the remarkable "two systems in one country" experiment will not work unless it is genuinely applied?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. When my right hon. Friend goes to the far east, he will discuss a whole range of matters, including many international matters, that arise because China is a permanent member of the Security Council, as well as a main player in the Pacific and in Asia. It will be a wide-ranging set of discussions. The Prime Minister and the Chinese leaders will undoubtedly range over the whole question of Hong Kong and the crucial importance of maintaining in practice as well as in words the principle of "two systems in one country."

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): When our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visits China, may I express the hope that he will also visit Hong Kong? Such a visit would be extremely popular. My right hon. Friend and all the others concerned on the British side, including Sir Percy Cradock, deserve the greatest credit for their success in producing what appears to be a satisfactory outcome to this long-running problem. Is not the lesson of this story that patience and persistence are particularly important in discussions with the Government of China?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister certainly intends to visit Hong Kong when he visits the far east and Peking. I am grateful for the way in which the House has reacted so far to my announcement. There has been a bit of a

knee-jerk tendency—not in this House but elsewhere—to treat any kind of understanding and co-operation with China about Hong Kong as some form of surrender. No one who has followed these negotiations could say that that is the course which has been followed this time. We came quite near to the point when everybody knew that the airport project might have to be postponed. That was a statement of reality, but it seemed sensible—obviously to both sides—before that stage was reached to make a final effort to resolve the difficulties that had persisted. I am very glad that that has been done.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will the Foreign Secretary reflect on the fact that, although the announcement about the building of the airport is very welcome, it may have been bought at too high a price, in that the Chinese Government have not negotiated with or consulted the Government and, more importantly, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, if the joint declaration is to mean anything—that Hong Kong will have a large measure of autonomy—the Legislative Council of Hong Kong must be involved in these important negotiations? If he does, will he refer the matter to his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister so that, when he goes to China, he finds out whether consultation can take place between the special administrative region-to-be and the Poeple's Republic of China? That is the proper way to go forward.

Mr. Hurd: As regards the immediate agreement, I am glad to say that the members of the ExCo were fully consulted and fully agreed. The first reports coming in today of the public comments of the unofficial members of LegCo are overwhelmingly favourable, as are the comments from the business community. So far, so good. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in the autumn of this year Hong Kong will take a step forward, in the sense that 18 members of the Legislative Council will be directly elected by universal suffrage.

That arrangement had some critics. However, it will become increasingly realised, as it is understood, that renewal of whatever the right figures are for 1995 will go through in 1997 and will be respected by the Chinese Government and carried through, therefore, into the special administrative region government. Although that does not go as far as the hon. Gentleman would like, it will be a considerable change and one that looks a good deal more solid than it would have been if we had gone for a higher figure this year, which would probably have been swept away in the middle of the decade.

Sir John Farr (Harborough) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Sir John Farr: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his successful efforts with the Chinese Government and may I especially direct my congratulations not only to him, but to all his staff who obviously worked so hard in such a persevering way with such a very difficult problem? Having said that, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether he will be a realist and realise that there is still a chance that the Chinese Government may see matters in another way? At this time, after my right hon. Friend's successful negotiations so far, would it not be advisable, before the hand-over date, to bring in the United Nations to underwrite any agreement that has been reached?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is a great pleasure to see him back in the House and looking so well. We have conducted this matter in a thoroughly realistic spirit, and the negotiations have been long—perhaps for that reason. However, I am very satisfied with the ultimate result. I do not pretend to my hon. Friend—or to anyone else—that the agreement will ensure that there will be no more problems and anxieties between now and 1997, because the effort that has to be made to bring about two systems in one country is extraordinarily difficult. I am not sure that the formal involvement of the United Nations would be helpful, but everyone knows that the success of Hong Kong is due to its international character. Many people are keeping a close and helpful eye on how the arrangements fare.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Can the Foreign Secretary say when the new airport is expected to become operational? Is he confident that British firms will gain a reasonable share of contracts for that giant project? Is he aware that the BBC has reported that there has been an agreement that a minimum level of reserves will be left in Hong Kong in 1997 under the agreement? Has there been any clarification of a recent report that a senior Chinese Government official said that the Chinese Government were not bound in any way by any agreements that have been made, including the Bill of Rights, and that, as far as the Chinese Government are concerned, 1997 is a clean slate? Has there been any urgent clarification of that worrying statement?

Mr. Hurd: Those were three very relevant questions. First, the Hong Kong Government can now go ahead with the first work on the airport. The full agreement comes into effect when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister signs it. The Hong Kong Government can go ahead with the immediately necessary work. I do not know exactly when the first runway will be operational. The original hope was that it would be operational before the transfer of power. That may still be so. However, those are now matters for the Hong Kong Government, and not for Her Majesty's Government. It is a fine project which has been carefully worked through, and it will be extremely impressive.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Memorandum of Understanding, he will see the undertaking:

"On the basis of the above understandings the Hong Kong Government will plan its finances with the firm objective that the fiscal reserves on 30 June 1997 to be left for the use of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government will not be less than HK$25 billion. The present reserves are 72 billion Hong Kong dollars. It was thought by those who advised us that that was a reasonable undertaking."

The Chinese are, of course, bound by the joint declaration, and they have frequently emphasised that fact. In the future, they will be bound by the Basic Law. As regards human rights, they are bound by the undertakings that both those documents contain.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will endeavour to call the hon. Members who are rising, provided that they ask brief questions. I should like to start the next debate at 4.45 pm at the latest, because there is great pressure to speak in it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mister—what does he call himself? Mr. Morris. I mean Mr. Norris.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Not for the first time, Mr. Speaker, but never mind.

I add my congratulations to those which my right hon. Friend has already received, and congratulate his team, too. Does not my right hon. Friend agree that, especially for the business community, the airport project has long been the litmus test of the warmth of the relationship with the People's Republic of China in general, and especially after 1997, and that the agreement therefore bodes well for business confidence not only in the colony but here, because if British firms are up to the mettle, they may be able to participate closely in the airport and other projects?

Mr. Hurd: The point has been raised before, and I did not answer it when the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) raised it. It is important that there should be a level playing field and that those responsible for letting the contracts, who do not of course include Her Majesty's Government, should give a fair wind and equitable treatment to the bids put in by British contractors. I very much hope that British contractors and consultants will bestir themselves. They cannot expect business to be handed to them on a plate, and I hope that all those with influence in the matter will make sure that they are awake to the opportunities for British industry that this huge project affords.

What my hon. Friend said about the feelings of business men has been made clear to me many times over the months. They wanted an agreement, not just because of the importance of the airport but because, as my hon. Friend said, they saw it as a sign of whether or not there was good co-operation. But it did not seem to us that that feeling among the business community, which is entirely understandable, should make us short-circuit the negotiations or produce a result that would in some way weaken or reduce the authority of the Government of Hong Kong between now and the middle of 1997. That would have created new difficulties and anxieties in other parts of Hong Kong. We had to reconcile the two aims, and I think that we have now done so.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): My right hon. Friend will know that both Hong Kong and China have many friend on both sides of the House who will have been given great pleasure by his announcement. Does the agreement to which he referred also cover proposals for substantial increases in port facilities, which were an integral part of the original port and airport development strategy proposals? That is particularly important because Hong Kong is the gateway to south China and south China would benefit greatly from increased harbour facilities.

Does my right hon. Friend also agree——

Mr. Speaker: Order: I think that one question is enough on a day as busy as this.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend will see an annexe to the memorandum which sets out the core programme projects —the projects that are already agreed without the need for further consultation. Other projects that straddle 1997 will be subject to the kind of consultation mentioned in the memorandum but will then be for decision as the joint declaration provides.

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): I welcome most warmly the progress on the airport. May I congratulate my right hon. Friend and, through him, the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir David Wilson, on their robust leadership for the people of Hong Kong? Does he agree that the most important way in which to secure the long-term future of Hong Kong is the proper, full and effective implementation of the 1984 joint declaration, which provides for the full preservation of the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. I am very conscious of the fact that the Governor and his advisers, rather than the Government here, have been in the hot spot. It was very difficult to handle these matters successfully—with a free press, free communications and free debate in Hong Kong—but they have done so through difficult negotiations and I congratulate them.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that in the current world recession, with civil aviation doing particularly badly, the one area of growth is still the far east, where Hong Kong provides a vital civil aviation hub, and that, in terms of business confidence for the future, the go-ahead for the airport was vital?

On the question of British contractors getting work, does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that there has been no shortage of British initiative in securing contracts to build the airport at Macau? I very much hope that British firms will be equally adventurous when it comes to securing contracts for the future building of Hong Kong's airport.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend puts it very well, and I entirely endorse what he says.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this very welcome settlement of the question of the new Hong Kong airport removes some significant obstacles to the development of our wider interests in the far east? As British Airways is keen to extend its service to Hong Kong and to Taiwan twice a week to compete with Cathay Pacific, KLM and with a subsidiary of Japanese Air Lines which already operate there, and as there is already contact between the Taiwanese and the Chinese, will my right hon. Friend facilitate our national flag carrier's application to operate there?

Mr. Hurd: I detect a difficulty in that question. I think that I had better not answer it off the cuff. Either I or my right hon. Friend will write to my hon. Friend.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): May I add to the congratulations on my right hon. Friend's achievement from patient diplomacy. Has there been a genuine change that leads him to believe that patience and diplomacy are now recognised by the other side as the proper way to proceed?

Mr. Hurd: This is an example of how patience overcomes obstacles. We can all draw lessons from the exchanges and difficulties and the way in which we have solved them.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): As a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs when it reported on Hong Kong, I know exactly how important the project was, both politically and economically. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary deserves credit for the perseverance shown in ensuring that the deal is the right one. Will he also note that it was clearly shown in the joint declaration

—which I understand has the status of a treaty in the United Nations—that Britain has a responsibility to ensure that Hong Kong has economic prosperity and social stability by 1997, and that that means working in close co-operation with the Government of China to ensure that end? Is that now recognised by the Government of China, and do they recognise also their responsibilities to ensure that there is a stable economic system through 1997?

Mr. Hurd: I believe that those points are understood. We must now develop ways to intensify the co-operation. I believe that we now have a much better chance of doing that without people feeling that in some way the authority of the Hong Kong Government between now and 1997 is being undermined.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I hope that my right hon. Friend will not take it amiss if I say that, although I congratulate him on the achievement of this solution, one must say frankly that it is a deal that we would have preferred not to have been obliged to conclude. I believe that my right hon. Friend will agree that the House will inevitably face a conflict between Chinese power and British responsibility as 1997 approaches. I hope that he also agrees that the Chinese should not draw the conclusion from the agreement that they should seek to interfere further because that would damage the interests of Hong Kong and of mainland China.

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that they will draw that conclusion from the way the negotiations have progressed. We are faced with a huge project that required perhaps one quarter of its finance from private investment. It was simply a fact—we have to deal in facts—that that investment would not have been forthcoming unless there had been some Chinese acquiescence in the project. That is a fact. We have got more than some reluctant acquiescence: I would say that we have full-hearted approval of the project. Although it is certainly a deal, like most of these practical arrangements, it is a deal that is overwhelmingly in the interests of Hong Kong.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Will my right hon. Friend add my warm congratulations to the roll call of approval this afternoon? Does he accept that the agreement will do much to sustain the confidence of the people in the long-term future of Hong Kong, thus rooting them in their country and giving them the expectation of a reliable future?

Mr. Hurd: There will be prickly problems ahead, as my hon. Friend suggests. However, we can tackle them through the machinery now in place, which has been strengthened as a result of the Memorandum of Understanding. We can tackle them with a better chance than we had before of finding the right kind of answer.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on this understanding. What kind of an airport have we agreed to? Is it a much smaller airport? Does it have the port facilities, factory sites and highways that were originally envisaged? Did my right hon. Friend or anyone else consult the two legislative assemblies—the Executive Council and LegCo—on the issue before the understanding was reached?

Mr. Hurd: If my hon. Friend looks at the annexe to the Memorandum of Understanding, he will see the main projects of the core of the airport and that it is basically the project that was originally designed. It is a major airport and a major project, but the details and the decisions are not for the British Government; they are for the Hong Kong Government.

On my hon. Friend's second question, ExCo was fully consulted and unanimously approved. One cannot consult LegCo on confidential negotiations but, as I have said, it appeared from the tapes this morning that the initial reaction of Unofficial Members is favourable.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): In recognising the crucial importance of this agreement for confidence in Hong Kong and for the future economic growth of that area, does my right hon. Friend see that as further evidence of a greater identity of view and sense of co-operation between the permanent members of the Security Council —an identity of view that could be used to great effect in other parts of the world where there are regional problems, such as the middle east, the Horn of Africa and Cyprus?

Mr. Hurd: Like others, we have found that it is now much easier to discuss wider international matters with the Chinese Government than it used to be. There is plenty of scope for that—for example, the issue of arms control and the criteria for exports of weaponry are important subjects in which the Chinese have an important role to play.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that, in keeping with the fine traditions of this House, under which you have a tricorn hat, wig and gown, it is in order for me to wear a hat, provided that I remove it when addressing you? Will you also confirm that my wearing it will not in any way curtail the democratic voice in the House of the people of Winchester?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, that is the democratic right of the hon. Gentleman. It is a long tradition. In centuries past, hon. Members frequently wore hats. The trouble is that if an hon. Member wears a hat, it is difficult for me to recognise him *[Laughter]*. That is the problem.

BILL PRESENTED

British Railways Board (Finance)

Mr. Secretary Rifkind, supported by Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. David Mellor and Mr. Roger Freeman, presented a Bill to alter the limits under section 42(6) of the Transport Act 1968 relating to the indebtedness of the British Railways Board and the limits on the amount of compensation payable in respect of certain public service obligations of the Board: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 207.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

COMPANIES HOUSE TRADING FUND

That the draft Companies House Trading Fund Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Estimates Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1991-92

Class IV, Vote 1

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1990-91 on British Steel—Ravenscraig and Clydesdale (House of Commons Paper No. 63), and the Government Reply contained in the Second Special Report from the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1990-91 (House of Commons Paper No. 473).]

Steel Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further sum, not exceeding £81,404,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on regional developments grants, regional selective assistance, selective assistance to individual industries and firms, UK contributions arising from its commitments under the International Natural Rubber Agreement, a strategic mineral stockpile, support for the film, aerospace and shipbuilding industries, assistance to redundant steel workers, and other payments.—*[Mr. Allan Stewart.]*

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient also to discuss the second estimate on the Order Paper—class XV, vote 3—

That a further sum, not exceeding £421,137,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £161,194,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Scottish Office Industry Department on Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise; on regional enterprise grants; on technical and vocational education; on the promotion of tourism; on financial assistance to the electricity industry and local enterprise companies; on residual expenditure for the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board; on roads and certain associated services, including the acquisition of land, lighting, road safety and related services; on assistance to local transport; on support for transport services in the highlands and islands; on piers and harbours, and on certain other transport services and grants; and on other sundry services in connection with trade and industry, etc.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you tell us whether the Secretary of State for Scotland will be present for the debate? The right hon. Gentleman has figured prominently north of the border on the steel debate in Scotland, not only in the Scottish press but also on Scottish television, which, unfortunately, is not beamed into your office. He has been at the centre of Government activity. Can you tell us whether he is at a garden party at Holyrood house this afternoon, or is likely to be able to attend the debate in which it is extremely important that he participates?

As you know, Mr. Speaker, from my intervention during business questions, we do not have a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which means that Scottish Members have only a limited ability rigorously to pursue and examine the Scottish Office and its performance. It would be a disgrace and an insult to the Scottish people if

the Secretary of State for Scotland was not present this afternoon to participate in the debate and to answer the highly pertinent questions that we want to put to him.

Mr. Speaker: I have responsibility for what happens in the Chamber, but it would be placing a heavy responsibility upon the Speaker if he had to know what right hon. and hon. Members do when they are outside the House. I have no idea where the Secretary of State is.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not wrong for a party that operates by leaks and smears to criticise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland who is carrying out the full responsibilities of that position by attending Her Majesty the Queen at Holyrood palace?

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to be drawn into that argument, but some functions are not by invitation, but by command.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing more that I can say about the matter.

Dr. Bray: It was the responsibility of the Government to arrange the business for today, and they did so in the full knowledge that the Secretary of State for Scotland would not be present. Was it a ruse to excuse him from the debate?

Mr. Speaker: How on earth would I know something like that?

4.40 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I am sure that the whole House hoped that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry—my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren)—could have been here today, as he chaired the Committee during its inquiry into the closure of the hot wide strip mill at Ravenscraig. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend has not been able to attend the House for a month because of ill health, although we hope that he will be back shortly. The members of the Committee called me to the Chair as acting Chairman in my hon. Friend's absence, and it is in that capacity that I sought to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker.

The history of the Select Committee's interest in the steel industry goes back to the original Nationalised Industries Committee, which used to take a great interest, on behalf of the House, in many factors—both internal as well as external—affecting the health of the steel industry in the United Kingdom. When the departmentally-related Select Committees were established in 1980 in their present form, the then nationalised British Steel fell within the remit of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

The industry does not function in unfettered competition; it is subject to the articles and supervision of the European Coal and Steel Community, which has its own competition regulations. Technically, therefore, the Directorate-General of the European Commission does not have formal jurisdiction over the steel industry within the EEC. It was necessary to mention that because I shall shortly be referring to a document that has emanated from the Directorate-General for Competition in the EEC.

With the worldwide collapse—not just in Europe and the United Kingdom—in demand for steel products of every sort, the European Coal and Steel Community has made many provisions that differ from the strict competition requirements of the EEC, and require us to avoid gross over-capacity and to attempt to have, within the countries of the EEC, orderly industries rather than industries in competitive chaos.

On 16 May 1990, British Steel announced the planned closure of the hot wide strip mill at Ravenscraig, with the loss of 770 jobs. There was a further announcement on 8 November 1990 of plans to close the steel works and tube mill at Clydesdale early in 1991, with the loss of a further 1,200 jobs. It was in that context, rather than just as an inquiry that was not especially timely, that the Select Committee focused its attention not only on the internal position within British Steel—now, of course, in the private sector—as a whole, but on certain concentrated aspects.

The first was the effect on the local and more widespread economy of Scotland, in which the plant is located. For the very reason that was mentioned earlier —that there is no Select Committee considering Scottish affairs—the Trade and Industry Select Committee felt obliged to mount an inquiry into the consequences of the projected closure on the local and more widespread economy of Scotland—which, of course, is outside the fiduciary duties of the directors of British Steel, but is wholly within the remit of the Select Committee.

Secondly, we were concerned about the employment implications for those who had previously been employed in Ravenscraig and Clydesdale. That matter can fall within the fiduciary responsibilities of the directors of a public company. It is not a requirement, but modern company law enables it to do so. Therefore, it is not an irrelevant consideration either for the directors of British Steel or for the Select Committee.

We needed to examine the reasons why British Steel took that management decision and what alternative arrangements could have been made, given the market —as British Steel saw it—for the products produced both in Ravenscraig and Clydesdale and also in British Steel plants elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We were also concerned whether reduction in capacity at those plants in Scotland would produce a restriction in effective competition, which would enable British Steel to increase its prices in a way that it would not otherwise have been able to do. That is a fair statement of the framework in which the Committee conducted its investigations, which were not wholly located in Committee Room 15 at the Palace of Westminster.

The Committee visited not only Ravenscraig, but the British Steel site in south Wales which, in the plan given in evidence to the Committee by British Steel, was where it intended to concentrate production after the closure of Ravenscraig. We visited both sites, rather than simply taking verbal and written evidence at the House of Commons. Of course, it is often the case that the taking of evidence itself is an important service to the House of Commons, and the Select Committee on Procedure has often emphasised that. Sometimes, it is not the actual production of the report that is crucial, but the illumination of relevant factors through the taking of evidence in public—*[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) have a problem?

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I apologise to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: The collecting of written evidence, which is released both to the House and in the public sphere, is of great service to the House. I mention that because the hot wide strip mill at Ravenscraig was closed on 12 February 1991, whereas the Committee did not conclude its report until a week later, on 20 February. That was not due to any lassitude by the Committee, but because there was an exchange of correspondence with the EEC. We were awaiting evidence from that source, as well as taking evidence in the United Kingdom. We were not masters of our timetable.

The production of the report, although it came nine days after the actual closure, did not mean that the inquiry and the production of the report were a waste of time. They illuminated issues that were and are of great importance. I shall not attempt to summarise the entire report; I trust that hon. Members who are interested in the subject will have read it for themselves. I am glad to see that many hon. Members are present for this debate who were not members of the Select Committee.

The Procedure Committee, in its recent report on our Select Committees, emphasised that debates on Select Committee reports were not just events produced for the benefit of the members of the Select Committees concerned. The Committee reports to the House, and it is to enable the House to debate the issue constructively that is the prime service of the Select Committee.

Let me turn to the conclusions on page xvii—

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Before he does so, will the hon. Gentleman note the comment in paragraph 20, on page ix—

"The Clydesdale and Imperial Works have been losing money for the last six years"?

Special factors apply to Clydesdale; I am sure that my hon. Friends will mention them. It is not true, however, that Imperial—which is quite separate—was losing money. Is it not rather a pity that the report did not give the details?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: That may well be a point that the hon. Gentleman will wish to develop if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I suspect that, in the time allocated for this debate—and there are two debates this afternoon—the House would not wish me to monopolise more than a comparatively limited part of it.

I want in particular to refer to No. 2 in our summary of recommendations, which states:

"We recommend that the competition case on the closure of Ravenscraig should be further examined by the relevant authorities in the European Community."

We said that for a number of reasons, to some of which I have already alluded, because of the general supervision of the Competition Commission over the whole of productive industry. There are many other parts of productive industry in this country potentially affected by changes in the supply of steel which do not themselves come under the competition provisions of the European Coal and Steel Community. That is why we were interested in learning the views of the Competition Commission as well as those of the European Coal and Steel Community.

So was the Scottish Steel Campaign Trust, which wrote to the competition directorate of the European Commission. The Committee was sent a copy of the official reply from the Community, and it is to that that I now wish to refer. Before this debate, I sent the Clerk of the House, for laying on the Table, copies of this correspondence, because it is never fair to the House just to quote selected portions of a document unless other hon. Members can have the opportunity of reading the whole of it for themselves.

The Competition Commission's initial paragraph makes clear its lack of actual jurisdiction. It says:

"You will, of course, be aware that the Commission is under no legal obligation under the ECSC competition rules to state its position or to examine complaints such as the one you have made. Nevertheless in view of your members' responsibilities as public authorities and as representatives of the workers, the Commission is willing, as a matter of courtesy, to indicate how it sees the case. This letter deals with your complaint dated 26 October 1990 concerning the closure of the hot wide strip mill at British Steel's Ravenscraig works."

When we now come on to what was actually said in the letter—which extends to 59 paragraphs—there are, I think, five which draw together the strands of its conclusions. I start with paragraph 48, which states:

"The complainant has alleged that the failure to make the mill available to competitors, or to mothball it until such time as the steelworks is closed and then to offer the entire package to a competitor, is an abuse of a dominant position. This could be true only in very exceptional circumstances if this was the only practicable way that a competitor could enter the market."

According to paragraph 49,

"This is not so. Many competitors are already present in the United Kingdom either as direct sellers or as stockholders. These competitors can easily increase production or sales at any time. As they are already present on the market they face no barriers to entry."

That was the focus of the response from the Competition Commission on the question of whether British Steel should have offered the plant, which was redundant for its purposes, for sale to other competitors, and whether it was, in a sense, put in a position to manipulate market prices by its reduction in local capacity.

Paragraph 52 states:

"The refusal by BS to offer the Ravenscraig mill for sale or to mothball it pending an offer to sell it with the steelworks is not therefore an abuse of dominant position."

Let me turn now to paragraph 59, the last paragraph before the conclusion, which says:

"The complainants claim that the closure of the hot wide strip mill will inevitably lead to the closure of the remainder of the Ravenscraig complex and of the Dalzell plate mill. The Commission takes no view on this contention, but considers that even if this total closure comes about it is unlikely that there would be an infringement of the ECSC competition rules, and in particular of Article 66(7) ECSC, as BS is not dominant in the relevant market."

Lastly, the conclusion—paragraph 60—states:

"The Commission regrets to inform you that it can see no grounds on which to sustain your complaint."

I read that out for two reasons: first, because that response was not in the possession of the Committee when we finalised our report, and secondly because it is clearly relevant to the conclusions that the Committee drew in the absence of that information.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman's views on the further reference to the European authorities is well known following the vote that took place in the Committee. Does he not recall, however, that, in his evidence to the Committee, Sir Robert Scholey, British Steel's chairman, claimed that the European

Commission would exert some blocking power on the sale of the Scottish steel industry? He said, in fact, that "it would have them jumping out of their skins".

Is it not the case that both the letter from the Commission and the Committee's own further investigations proved that that was not true, and that, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the chairman of British Steel had attempted to mislead the Select Committee?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: The words with which I started my quotation give the Commission's own views on that. Those words can speak for themselves; they do not need me to speak for them. I am not authorised to speak on behalf of the European Commission. Nor am I authorised to speak on behalf of British Steel. But I do think that this letter makes an additional contribution to our debate today.

The other paper which is relevant to today's debate is, of course, the Government's response to our recommendations, which was published on 22 May by this Committee. We published reports and observations by the Government on the second report of the Trade and Industry Committee. So I think that that completes the papers which the House needs to consider in order to form an important judgment on this now irreversible series of events.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Before I call another hon. Member, I should say that Mr. Speaker has asked me to make a strong plea for short speeches. This debate must finish at 7.36 pm and a tremendous number of hon. Members wish to speak.

5.2 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): May I start by congratulating and thanking the Select Committee for its efforts and careful consideration of the issues. The hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) spoke with a certain precision and scholarly niceness, but that is far removed from the passion and red blood of the arguments in Scotland, where the steel industry's fate has caused great anxiety and understandable and justified bitterness.

I admire those who have conducted and maintained the campaign tirelessly, with impletion and dignity over a period of literally years. The work force and the stewards who represent them in Clydesdale, Ravenscraig and Dalzell have never flinched and have maintained their position with immense courage, determination and effectiveness.

I greatly regret that the Secretary of State for Scotland is not in the House today. It is now well known—almost notoriously well known—that he is in Edinburgh at a royal garden party. I recognise that he would normally be expected to keep such an engagement. However, the circumstances are exceptional and he should be here, accounting to hon. Members and the people of Scotland for his actions or lack of them.

Mr. Michael Brown: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will recall that the question of the whereabouts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland was drawn to Mr. Speaker's attention at the beginning of this debate. Mr. Speaker said that if the Secretary of State was attending an engagement at the Palace or Holyrood house, it was a command from the sovereign.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The House is wasting precious time with these points of order. That is a debating point and has nothing whatever to do with the Chair.

Mr. Dewar: On Monday this week, Lanarkshire and Scotland suffered a severe blow as a result of the Dalzell announcement. There are questions about the extent to which the Secretary of State was privy to British Steel's decision. There are severe doubts about the Government's commitment to rebuilding Lanarkshire's economy and whether promises of additional funding have been made in good faith. In his own interests, the Secretary of State should have been here to answer the charges that are being widely made about his competence and integrity.

On 26 June, the Secretary of State wrote to me refusing a meeting to discuss the steel industry and saying that there would be an opportunity, during the proposed estimates debate on steel, for Members to express their views on the Government's position in relation to the Scottish steel industry. I shall certainly make use of that opportunity, but, in the light of that letter, the Secretary of State's absence is extraordinary. He might have thought that he had a duty to listen and to learn. His behaviour can only reinforce fears about his ability to grasp the scale of Scotland's present problems.

It is a disease that has afflicted not only the Scottish Office. Although it is sad that the Secretary of State for Scotland is not present, it is compounded by the fact that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is not here either. After all, he is the Minister with direct responsibility for steel and his Department is very much involved in the estimates that we are discussing. Not only is neither Secretary of State present, but not even the Minister responsible for steel in the Department of Trade and Industry is here. It seems as though almost every Minister who should be here is absent without leave, which may be a measure of the embarrassment that they feel about what has been happening and the recent tragedies that have unfolded in the Scottish steel industry.

The tragedy has taken the form of a vendetta, ruthlessly conducted over many years by British Steel's top management. The evidence of malice has been persistent and unmistakable. The plants in many areas have had excellent records of productivity and the work force has shown a commitment to quality control. If, in some parts, there has been a shading of that performance in recent months, it is because of the persistent refusal in the past decade to give the plants and work force the tools and investment to carry out the job.

Some time ago, British Steel decided to concentrate on an even smaller number of sites. Scotland is not the only part of the United Kingdom to suffer and there will be other victims in the future if present policies are pursued. The obsession was reinforced by privatisation, and wider considerations of public interest were abandoned along with the work force which, in Clydesdale, Ravenscraig and Dalzell, have served the industry so well. Employees became no more than a disposable asset. Valid and well-founded technical and financial arguments were swept away, soon to be followed by the plants, simply because they did not fit into Sir Robert Scholey's grand design.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman commit a possible future Labour Government to keeping the plants at Dalzell and Scunthorpe open? Would they intervene to keep them open? Yes or no?

Mr. Dewar: The answer is simply that the Government's sin is not that they have failed but that they have not tried. We have seen a dereliction of duty by the Government over a considerable period. For example, I gather from an interview of the Under-Secretary of State in *The Scotsman* today that British Steel is prepared to clear the sites of its former plants only in the most superficial fashion. It refuses even to deal with the central problems of subsidence and contamination. The cost to the public purse has been estimated at over £50 million. We have a company that is not afraid to act as an industrial vandal and the Government have stood by and watched it happen. They do not care that their policies add insult to injury. The Scottish Office has, once again, been left lamenting and empty handed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): If the hon. Gentleman had been Secretary of State for Scotland for the past year, precisely what would he have done differently?

Mr. Dewar: We shall be saying a good deal about that. On the specific point with which I am dealing, I would have made it clear to British Steel that it could not simply nod an apology as it left and that it could not walk away without even clearing and preparing the sites that it was abandoning. I would not then lament the fact in a public interview in *The Scotsman* but apparently do nothing about it. I would not remain a member of a Government who, when hon. Members came to the Department of Trade and Industry worried about the loss of thousands of jobs, told those hon. Members that they were doing nothing and would do nothing because the Scottish Office had asked them to do nothing.

As long as I am in politics I shall remember the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who is responsible for the steel industry getting the name "Ravenscraig" wrong. Perhaps it was an unfortunate slip of the tongue. He then told me that he would not be involved and saw no need to be involved. The difference between a Government who are committed to trying to save those jobs and who believe that the industry has a future and are prepared to use the influence, leverage and pressure of the Government to do something about it, and a Government who make a virtue of the fact that they are doing nothing is the difference between success and failure, between betrayal and a Government who know their duty.

On Monday, British Steel attempted to pronounce the death sentence on Dalzell, moving ruthlessly on from the destruction of Clydesdale and Ravenscraig. The timing and form of the announcement is of some interest. The Minister owes us an account of the Government's involvement because it has been alleged that, on 4 June, British Steel told Ministers that that would happen. The Government therefore collaborated with the company. If that is true, they were simply the passive recipients of unwelcome news, interested only in minimising the embarrassment to the Government and distancing the Secretary of State as best they could from the coming disaster.

It has already been mentioned by other hon. Members that the Prime Minister was writing to the Dalzell stewards on 4 June—the very day—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a serious debate, let us hear what the Opposition have to say about it.

Mr. Dewar: I hope that my colleagues will not be offended, but I must confess that the comings and goings of the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) are of limited interest.

Mr. Oppenheim: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely it is reasonable for an hon. Member to walk out of the Chamber when, patently, he has not received an answer from the Opposition spokesman.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. There has been no breach of Standing Orders.

Mr. Dewar: Let me assure the hon. Member for Amber Valley—who I believe has finally left us—that I was making the point that I did not care whether he was here or there—he is usually both.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Cheap.

Mr. Dewar: The Whip is mouthing "Cheap" at me. I think that he recognised the description—that is probably the trouble.

I should like to return to the serious points. The Prime Minister was writing to the Dalzell shop stewards on 4 June, the very day on which we understand—it is up to the Minister to confirm it—that the Secretary of State for Scotland learnt of the decision to close the plant. Many people will wonder if the letter was any more than a defensive device, written in the knowledge of what was coming. The Secretary of State is shaking his head——

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary.

Mr. Dewar: Ah, well, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is shaking his head. He may be able to clear this up—we shall wait. I hope that he will give us some details. I recognise that his job is complex and difficult.

I was interested to read of the important concession made in an article in today's edition of *The Scotsman*, to which I have already referred. In it, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, talking of the industrial mix of Scotland, said:

> "In addition, there are situations when the Scottish Office has to know what is happening and liaise with Whitehall—an example of that would be Rosyth."

I am glad that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary and, no doubt, the Secretary of State recognise that there are occasions when the Scottish Office has to know what is happening. I should have hoped that the Scottish Office would like to know what is happening most of the time, but that may be an optimistic assumption to make of the present incumbents.

There are also rumours circulating about imminent announcements involving Rosyth. If they are as advertised, any words about being in touch with what is happening and liaising with Whitehall in that connection

may come back to haunt the Parliamentary Under-Secretary unless he can deliver in a way in which he has signally failed to do in the past for the steel industry in Scotland.

On 14 June, BBC Radio Scotland reported that the decision to close Dalzell had been taken and Ministers had been told of it. That was followed by fierce denials all round. It is typical. Throughout the proceedings, it seems that the Government have been more interested in saving face and manipulating the timetable for their own political purposes than in finding solutions to existing problems. That shabby episode does little for the confidence of those who hope for a little frankness in public affairs.

I now come to the substantive points. I believe that the Government lost the battle with British Steel at an early stage. It goes back to the days when the now Secretary of State for Transport was Secretary of State for Scotland and complacently told Scottish Members that privatisation was the best way of ensuring a secure future for the industry. The message was that British Steel always knew best.

The Government have never put British Steel under effective pressure. They have not acted with decision in the public interest. The Department of Trade and Industry did nothing and said nothing, claiming as its alibi that it had not been asked to help by the Scottish Office. We were left with the impression that the Secretary of State for Scotland was licensed by the Cabinet to make noises and protests as long as they were ineffective and as long as he did not embarrass his colleagues by asking them to join the fight. That is not the sort of service that we expect from a Government of the United Kingdom, and it is certainly not the sort of service and commitment that Scotland expects from a Secretary of State for Scotland.

There was a complacent acceptance of guarantees at the time of privatisation which turned out to be worthless. There has been a persistent refusal to recognise that the existence of the golden share—I concede that it has a limited remit—meant that the industry had a special standing and the Government had a special relationship with, and responsibility for, its fate.

The Secretary of State's casual admission to the Select Committee of the interests of prospective purchasers and the subsequent failure to act to allow them to pursue those interests seems lamentable. I stress that twice in recent months my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and I have made requests to both the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Scotland for meetings to discuss the future of the Scottish steel industry and the aftermath of the announcements that had then been made. On both occasions, both Secretaries of State replied that they would not have meetings with their opposite numbers because there was nothing to discuss.

I cannot remember any time in my career when, with a major industrial issue unresolved, with jobs and investments at stake and anxieties being expressed, a Secretary of State has refused point blank to discuss the matter or meet his opposite number because he felt that it was not necessary. Everyone in Scotland thought that the meeting was necessary. I do not belittle the fact that the problems are difficult to solve, particularly post-privatisation, but to say that there is no place for, and no point in, a meeting seems to be an insulting wish to save ministerial embarrassment at the expense of public interest and the parliamentary process.

What of the future? Steel making at Ravenscraig will continue at least until 1994. Plates will be produced at Dalzell until 1994 or perhaps as late as 1996. Are Ministers prepared to stand aside as spectators of the sad, dying decline of a great industry? The Government should be prepared, and Labour would be prepared, to look at new technology and to examine such options as thin slab casting. Ministers should be prepared to explore and push the Arthur D. Little options, not simply nod to them in passing. As I understood it, that was the view of the Select Committee, expressed in its conclusions and in the text of its report.

The Labour party has never accepted that the one plate mill strategy was inevitably right and the only way forward for the industry. What has happened this week fully justified our scepticism. I believe that, even now, there is a case for further investment in Dalzell and the introduction of accelerated cooling techniques. A strong financial case has been made for that investment, and the Government should not accept, as the Prime Minister has said, that the decision will be for British Steel to take on commercial considerations alone. There is a wider public interest which a wise Government would not ignore.

In its annual report, British Steel made it clear that a final decision on the Teesside investment would be taken only when the budget had been agreed and optimum financial and technical terms had been finalised. The stewards at Dalzell are rightly determined to argue the commercial case, despite British Steel's record of embittering indifference. Above all, Ministers should be pressing British Steel to offer their existing plants in Scotland for sale in the open market. The Government preach the gospel of competition, the spirit——

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaugh): It is the first time that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned Teesside, and there are no Labour Members representing Teesside present. Would a Labour Government stop investment in Teesside and so stop the joy and jobs which it has brought to my constituents in that hard-pressed part of the north-east of England simply because the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) wears a Scottish hat and is not concerned with the whole country?

Mr. Dewar: No, and if the hon. Gentleman had listened to my arguments he would understand why. We welcome investment in the industry, and modernisation. Throughout the long, hard and sometimes depressing days of the campaign, the steel workers in Scotland have never cavilled about development in south Wales or the north of England or anywhere else. We still want a modern, competitive industry. What I have said—and I hold to this—is that we have consistently argued that the idea that one can concentrate on not just five integrated sites, but reduce it to two or three at the most—so that one concentrates and concentrates still further—is not necessarily the right formula for the industry. Of course, I welcome investment in Teesside, but I do not believe that that excludes investment in Dalzell or other parts of the industry.

To return to my point about sale on the open market, the Secretary of State told the Select Committee that there had been "approaches from interested parties", but that they did not have the information to pursue matters. In that case the Government should have made sure that they were in a position at least to make their approach and to consider whether they could get to the stage of an offer. If

[Mr. Dewar]

British Steel is so certain that there is no case for a strip mill at Ravenscraig of for a plate mill at Dalzell, what risk does it run in testing the market? The only explanation is that it wants to knock out the capacity. I should not have thought that an attractive argument to a Government who preach the doctrine of competition.

What about the future? There have been many easy promises to rebuild Lanarkshire's industrial base. It is, of course, easier to make the commitment than to carry it out. Even if the Government have failed the steel industry it is important that people be convinced that a new and diversified economy is the long-term aim of the Government and that in the short term immediate steps are being taken to lay the foundations for that. Precious little, however, has happened so far. A working party has been set up. I have been told, I do not know whether accurately, that its chairman opened the first meeting by saying that the group should base its plans on the assumption that there would be no additional finance. Certainly, there does not seem to be enough money to measure up to the scale of the crisis.

The Prime Minister told the party faithful at Perth on 10 May:

"For too long the outdated face of Scottish industry turned opportunity away. Now people and businesses are voting for Scotland with their cash and with their feet."

The Prime Minister's message has obviously not got through to Sir Robert Scholey. The Prime Minister did, however, recognise in the same speech

"that for all the progress since 1979, some parts of Scotland have managed these changes less easily than others. Lanarkshire is one."

I think that that was a delicate reference to unemployment and to the closure of the steel industry.

The upshot was the offer of £15 million to green over the worst areas of industrial decline. There was something a touch patronising about that. The Labour party is not interested in greening over the memories of industrial decline. We want to put in its place viable industries that provide jobs and a high technology base for a work force with skill, commitment and a wish to earn their way.

Where is the £15 million? I asked the economic section of the Library to look into the matter. It told me that the money was not in the June supplementary estimates—so far, it appears to have had life only on the page of a party conference speech. That is rather curious; after all, the speech was made at the beginning of May and the estimates were for June. If the Government had been genuinely committed to finding even that limited additional money for Lanarkshire I should have expected it to appear in the June supplementary estimates. It may just be a little late and be on its way, but I should like an unambiguous answer from the Under-Secretary.

The Government have responded to the package unveiled by the working party, but I must protest that the small print makes depressing reading. The working party spoke of the need for spending between £200 million and £300 million and it required between £85 million and £110 million for immediate projects. Measured against that, the Government's response adds up to next to nothing.

Of course, large figures are bandied about, but most of them come from programmes already in being. The commissioning of a much-needed general hospital at Wishaw—awaited for many years—is hardly a tailor-made response to the crisis in the steel industry. The Government's efforts begin to fall apart on closer inspection. The A8 upgrading from Baillieston to Newhouse, on the stocks for years, is only to be the object of a further design study. At second glance that looks like a way of putting off the project. The additional money that the regional council will have to find as its contribution will merely be a factor for consideration in next year's revenue grant settlement.

The central plan for enterprise zone status is only to be considered by the Government

"against the background of its existing policy on Enterprise Zones and the cost which might be involved."

Asked to explain what that meant the Minister protested:

"It means exactly what it says."

That is the problem. It sounds like a further recipe for muddle and delay and it will probably end with a victory for the Treasury.

We are all uncomfortably aware that Scotland is not bouncing back towards economic recovery. We are plunging into recession. The Minister should look at the report just published by Cambridge Econometrics which gloomily states that the north-south divide is a permanent feature of the economic landscape and that when recovery ultimately comes growth in Scotland will be lower than in any other part of Britain.

Against that background the Government's performance is unconvincing and inadequate. The truly damaging charge is not that they have failed but that they did not even try. There has been no commitment, and no willingness to take the fight to British Steel, to challenge, to harry, to use with imagination the power and influence of the Government. The dreary story of political failure is bad enough. Far worse are its implications for the future of Lanarkshire and of its people, who have worked and delivered honourably in often difficult economic conditions over the years.

The Government's response does not begin to measure up to these people's needs, to reflect the respect that they have earned or to repay the debt of honour owed. British Steel has treated the industry and the people shabbily. That is a disgrace and a disappointment. It would be a tragedy in the fullest sense of the word if the Government now abdicated their responsibility.

5.25 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I follow the speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) with some pleasure and with an apology. The hon. Gentleman said that he wanted a viable high-technology-based industry in Scotland. When I have finished speaking—I apologise for this—I shall have to leave for a meeting in which a huge investment in just such a base in Scotland is being prepared and discussed. We do not need any lessons, therefore, from Labour Members——

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): A champagne bottling plant?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am afraid that Highland Spring, based in my constituency, contains no wine—and it was I who brought the company there, since when it has employed a great many people.

When discussing the steel industry in Scotland we should remember how Ravenscraig came about in the first

place. It was a political bribe to Scotland. I do not care what colour of Government put it there but it should have been a plant in Wales. The Government refused that idea and the Department responsible for industry at the time suggested throwing a sop to each Cerberus and giving Scotland a steel industry—in the wrong place, away from deep water, near which it would have been viable. Thus was Ravenscraig born. Like all similar industrial-political bribes for Scotland, it has paid a terrible penalty. Nevertheless, it became a source of employment, not just in the industry but for suppliers and shops. It sucked in people from England. So did Linwood which was a ridiculous industrial investment foisted on the place by a Government trying to buy votes in Scotland. Then there was Alcan—it was in the wrong place; Fort William pulp mill—also in the wrong place; likewise Bathgate.

Predictably, all these plants failed because they were installed not for commercial or industrial reasons but for political reasons. They sucked in enormous numbers of people, not from Scotland but from other parts of the United Kingdom. When the collapse came, created communities which were viable only on the basis of this great industrial investment were left with nothing to do. Ravenscraig was one of the most tragic of those. Hunterston is in deep water but it is in mothballs and shut. The most important factor in the production of steel is the cost of transport. Most viable steelworks are on the coast and that is why they remain viable.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: No, I shall give way later.

Mr. Campbell: It is on this point.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I did not think that Opposition Members understood my point.

We have a responsibility to be brave and it was cheap and stupid for the hon. Member for Garscadden to suggest that the Secretary of State was dependent on a sovereign. I am willing to bet 1,000p to a dime or a Scots penny that if roles had been the other way round the hon. Member for Garscadden would have been a collier, and would certainly not have been at Ravenscraig.

False political industrial developments should not be countenanced. There are tens of thousands more people employed in Scotland than when we took office, and that message should go out from the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Scotland's population is falling.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: That means that an even greater percentage of the population is employed. It is falling because the Liberal Democrats are not frightfully good at conceding anything. Scotland has 40 per cent. of inward investment and people there enjoy a quality of life better than that in any other part of Europe. That is why new companies can be persuaded to come to Scotland.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): This is a music hall turn.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: There is nothing wrong with the music hall. Greenock used to have music halls before the hon. Member represented it, but he is so boring that they have all closed.

Socialism did not invent the steel industry; it was invented by private enterprise. We cannot have industrial museums nor can we say that industries should be maintained simply because they have always been there. That is quite the wrong approach. The correct approach is new investment and new concepts. I am informed by those who claim to know that more than 80 per cent. of everything that hon. Members will use by the end of the century has still to be invented. That is the market that we must seek. Industrial dinosaurs must not be kept in being. Let us be inspired about getting investment into Scotland. I am trying to do something about that, and I hope that the Opposition are doing the same.

5.34 pm

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): I shall not attempt to comment on the amusing and rather quaint speech by the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). It is clear that he did not read our Select Committee report.

We should bear in mind that we are debating not only the steel industry in Scotland, but the industry throughout the United Kingdom. This is an opportune time to do that just three days after British Steel reported the most miserable year in living memory, a year in which output was significantly reduced and profits were down by 65 per cent. According to the newspapers, Sir Robert Scholey is to take a pay cut. We are not told the size of the cut or whether it will be 65 per cent. in line with the drop in profits. We shall wait and see.

The debate takes place one day after the latest OECD report makes crystal clear that the recession in Britain is far worse than in any other western country and that, in the main, it is due to Government policy. Ministers should accept that the recession is not an act of God but a result of their policies.

The recession is especially tragic for the steel communities which in the 1980s went through the most appalling social pain when plant after plant was closed and 120,000 jobs were destroyed—all in the interests of creating a greatly reduced industry that would be ripe for privatisation.

A vast investment of taxpayers' money led to huge increases in productivity in the remaining BSC plants and one after another they entered the private sector. Those companies were Allied Steel and Wire, Sheffield Forgemasters, United Engineering Steels and, finally, British Steel plc.

Rotherham lost 10,000 jobs during that period of restructuring—a term invented by the European Commission which means closure. The community that I represent has not recovered from those job losses. Unemployment is still appallingly high in Rotherham. I am not speaking about the travel-to-work area which includes the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). In my constituency, almost 7,000 are out of work.

Conservative Members who have not seen such a process in their constituencies may not understand the terrible consequences and the distress, poverty, family strain and ill-health that unemployment brings. We are still suffering in Rotherham. In Rotherham, as in other steel areas, people thought that some good would come of all that pain. United Engineering Steels emerged as the biggest and, at that time, the most productive engineering

[Mr. Stan Crowther]

steel maker in the European Community. We thought that that company, which had been slimmed down and was lean and fit—those were the expressions Ministers used in those days—could hold its own and beat any competitor in Europe. Unfortunately, we overlooked the Government's limitless capacity to get things wrong. These dedicated apostles of privatisation, the disciples of the free market, have not only left the steel industry to sink or swim but have done their best to push its head under water. An industry that was supposed to be leaner and fitter is now struggling to survive. It is still contracting. Almost every month more closures and more redundancies are announced.

The closure of Ravenscraig is an excellent illustration of the mess in which the industry finds itself. It is not good enough to say that the closure had to take place because of some surplus capacity in Europe. We went through all that in the 1980s. During that period there were so many closures and 120,000 jobs were lost. That happened because we were being pressed by the European Commission to reduce capacity because of a supposed surplus. It is no good saying now that there is a surplus and that the Ravenscraig hot mill must close.

There is no surplus capacity in Britain. How can anyone pretend that there is when 38 per cent. of the home market for these products is supplied by imports? How can it be claimed that there is surplus manufacturing capacity in Britain in the light of that level of imports?

When the Select Committee on Trade and Industry was conducting an inquiry into Ravenscraig, someone told us that Ravenscraig was too far from its customers in the vehicle industry. That is more or less the argument that was advanced by the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross. How can that be justified when German manufacturers, for example, can get their products into the west midlands? It is nonsense to suggest that Ravenscraig is too far away from the industry that needs its products.

The House will have noticed that the Select Committee's report contains some fairly critical comments about Sir Robert Scholey. I feel that the criticism is not unfair. The most amazing fact to emerge, apart from the fact that Sir Robert had not been near the Ravenscraig works for five years, was that he refused to give the economic justification for closing the Ravenscraig hot mill not only to the shop stewards but to the Secretary of State for Scotland. That is what he told us. I think that all the members of the Select Committee found that astonishing.

The Select Committee's report contains certain criticisms of Bob Scholey but I do not blame him for the terrible difficulties that his company and others are facing. Instead, I blame the Government. A large part of the problem stems from the ridiculous exchange rates at which the Prime Minister, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, took us into the exchange rate mechanism. I spoke to many British manufacturers at the time, and almost all of them were in despair. They knew that their German competitors were rubbing their hands with glee.

Then there came another body blow, for United Engineering Steels and other large electricity users. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth referred to it when he spoke in the energy debate. All the steel that emerges from United Engineering Steels is produced through the electric-arc process, and it is the largest purchaser of electricity in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. It is having to cope with an increase in electricity prices of about 20 per cent. That is a direct consequence of the privatisation of the electricity industry.

If anyone doubts my assertion, I shall take a few moments to explain why I make it. When the electricity industry was being privatised, we were told that the outcome would be competition. It was said that privatisation would enable large users to shop around and buy their electricity from the best source that they could find. That has not been the outcome. There is a man who is known as the Director General of Electricity Supply, who is empowered to fix a limit in each region on the amount of electricity that can be bought directly from the generating companies, and in Yorkshire and Humberside the limit is 10 per cent. Therefore, United Engineering Steels cannot shop around and approach PowerGen, National Power and the Yorkshire regional company to see which organisation can offer the best price. The competition that we were promised has not appeared and there is not a free market.

The arrangement which used to be beneficial to large consumers of electricity, under which they could obtain a discount because they were huge purchasers, was abolished in April. As a result, the large consumers are suffering on two fronts. I explained that when I went with my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and members of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation to meet the Under-Secretary of State for Energy. The hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) seemed to know nothing about the difficulties faced by consumers. He said that in any event it was nothing to do with him and that responsibility rested with the director general.

It is the habit of Ministers to push through the Government's policies, even though they are warned of the dangers by those who know something about the likely outcome of them, and then to leave others to pick up the pieces. Ministers cannot continue for ever to blame others. All the main steel-using industries—vehicles, shipbuilding, construction and machine tools—are in the doldrums as a result of the Government's policies. It is time that Ministers started to take a genuine interest in manufacturing industry and to stop saying that it is all someone else's fault when things go wrong. They have a duty to give the steel industry and steel-using industries a chance to compete on equal terms with foreign manufacturers. It is a chance that they have not given them so far.

Energy costs, interest rates and exchange rates militate against British manufacturers, and all these factors come within the realm of Government policies. If Ministers would only do their duty and give the steel industry and steel-using industries a fighting chance, I am convinced that our steel men could beat the competition anywhere else in the world.

5.46 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I agree with some of the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther). He was, of course, a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, and I know that he knows a great deal about the steel industry. His recounting of the repercussions of closures for his constituency highlight the problems that concern Lanarkshire today, and even more so in future. I thank the Select Committee

on Trade and Industry—the Chairman is my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), and my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), who presented the report, is a member of it—for producing the report. It seems that the theme throughout the report is the failure of British Steel to communicate with the Government, with its employees and with the Select Committee. It was wrong of British Steel to shelter behind commercial information or judgment and not to reveal the financial criteria that forced it to come to a conclusion that no one else could understand.

It was obvious from the start that British Steel had no interest in its Scottish base, but, as the hon. Member for Rotherham has said, there is a huge Scottish market. I think of the oil fields, steel fabricators, the construction industry and a thousand or more other users. It was wrong to concentrate on markets south of the border, on the continent or in other parts of the world. As the hon. Member for Rotherham has said, steel produced in Germany and in other parts of the continent is readily available in Scotland. Why cannot we produce steel profitably in Scotland? It has been wrong of British Steel to concentrate future developments in England and Wales to the detriment of the work force employed in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) was right to talk about the responsible campaign that has been pursued on behalf of the industry's work force and its trade unions and by the Scottish Trades Union Congress. I found little in the Select Committee's report that substantiated, even under cross-examination, a good reason to close the steel industry in Scotland. That was brought out extremely well on pages 8 and 9 of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation's publication, where the Select Committee's report is examined succinctly and concisely. It highlights British Steel's poor showing before the Select Committee, the lack of information, the way in which British Steel reneged on its promises on the sale of Ravenscraig and, as a side issue—something which is topical at present—the substantial increase in the salaries of British Steel directors despite the dwindling profits that were announced last week.

I would not like to be a prophet or to quote my own words, but during the Gartcosh debate on 23 January 1986, at column 485, I spoke of the link between the closure of Gartcosh and Ravenscraig, how Ravenscraig was a great symbol a manifestation of the Scottish steel industry, and how, if Gartcosh were closed, the fallout would be serious for the Scottish steel industry. We must remember that if it had not been for the effective work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), British Steel would have done its best to shut Ravenscraig in 1982.

In the Gartcosh debate, I also asked what would happen to Dalzell, Clydesdale and Imperial if the closure of Gartcosh was not stopped; what about the repercussions on local industry; what about the local suppliers, and so on. We have had a long time to think about what could happen once we accepted the closure of Gartcosh.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Gentleman knows that at the time, as the Member of Parliament representing Gartcosh, I was particularly grateful for his support. However, does he accept—I think that he will—that the problems of site clearance at Gartcosh and elsewhere underline how miserly and mean British Steel is being in the announcement that we read in *The Scotsman* this morning?

Sir Hector Monro: Yes, indeed. I have not finished with British Steel.

I also said that, in 1986, the South of Scotland electricity board received £1·7 million for the supply of power to the steel industry, and asked the House to consider what that could mean to the electricity industry in Scotland and the 1,400 suppliers to the steel industry in Lanarkshire, all of whom are now feeling the draught. I went on to say that the steel industry is, in a way, an indication of a nation's virility and that Ravenscraig without Gartcosh would be vulnerable. I protested. I felt that we had misjudged the industrial, political and social repercussions, and on that occasion I voted against the Government because I felt that we were giving the wrong signal to British Steel and to Scotland in general.

Let us look at what has happened during the past 13 months. I am highly critical of British Steel. It was announced that the hot strip mill was to close, with 770 unemployed. In November, the announcement was made about Clydesdale tube works. In February the reduction to the single blast furnace at Ravenscraig was announced. In June 1991, the Dalzell plate mill was closed. All that resulted in substantial unemployment.

That is a dreadful record for British Steel. Has it no responsibility to the nation or to its work force? Does it only have a responsibility to its shareholders? Great national institutions such as British Steel and ICI, or any other major company one can think of, have a wider responsibility than just to their shareholders. They have a duty to try to find a middle way forward to help when the situation is grave and difficult.

I know that boards, like the Cabinet, must have collective responsibility, but when one considers all the members of the British Steel board, I find it odd that none of them ever speaks out and questions what British Steel is doing. It is a great worry that a company of the importance of British Steel seems to have shied away from a fair introduction of capital to Scotland to enable some of the plants to remain open and for many of the employees to retain their jobs.

If that is to happen—I am highly critical of British Steel rather than anyone else—what shall we do now to help those in difficulty in Lanarkshire and those who will experience the knock-on effect of more closures? Will British Steel rethink? Having read Sir Robert Scholey's evidence to the Select Committee, I doubt whether he will. But let us check what he should be doing.

Will British Steel clear up the mess left behind by empty steel works? We believe strongly that the polluter must pay, as evidenced by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Are we to hound British Steel to clear up the areas for which it has been responsible for generations? How shall we help the Lanarkshire development agency, now the local enterprise company, and Motherwell district council, all of which have put forward excellent papers?

I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Minister replies, he will be able to spell out—I am sure he will—the substantial sums of money that the Government and others are making available to help in the crisis. We should not look on it as less than a crisis for Lanarkshire during the next couple of years. I am glad that the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have made

[Sir Hector Monro]

announcements, following the work of the Lanarkshire working group and others involved. We must simply press ahead with urgency to lay the foundations for a renaissance of industry in the area.

I met the same problems in a much smaller way when the coal mines closed in Upper Nithsdale, which was then in my constituency, when unemployment soared to 30 per cent. and more. The only way back was to have advance factories ready and waiting for incoming employers. They do not want to be told that it will take a year to produce a factory: they want to move in next week if they possibly can. Therefore, I would like to hear that Enterprise Scotland or the local enterprise company will press on with preparations for advance factories suitably sited and landscaped.

Everyone wants a high standard of workplace in the future. People do not want to go to derelict sites; they want to go to new attractive sites. We have got to work fast on that. We do not want to start next year; we want the architectural plans under way now and through the planning committees by October, and action on site as soon as possible in the new year.

We want to see co-operation. I know that we will get it from the jobcentres. We must bring in Locate in Scotland and, all importantly—something which the Government are addressing as the highest priority—the economic climate of the country must be right, with continuing low inflation and a steady lowering of interest rates.

There is the great opportunity of a new freight terminal at Mossend. However, if that is to happen, the Government would have to put pressure on British Rail. I hope that the Minister will comment on that when he replies. It would produce many new jobs on a green-field site. I hope that my hon. Friend will say that discussions are under way with British Rail and that such a terminal will be encouraged.

The west coast route will lose a lot of steel traffic. Whenever I come to the House of Commons, I stand in Carlisle station and see trainload on trainload of coiled steel going through. That will stop, so let us get some other attraction to bring British Rail to Scotland with an additional freight facility which I am sure will be developed further when the channel tunnel is opened.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will spell out what help will be available. Today we want to leave a message for Lanarkshire and the whole of the area of Strathclyde, which has had such a terrible knock that, yes, we are determined to provide opportunities. Yes, we will fulfil that promise by providing adequate resources to create the right infrastructure, construct advance factories, and bring new employers to the area. If we have a sense of urgency, motivation and enthusiasm, we can work together in partnership to help that part of Scotland.

5.59 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am grateful for the opportunity for this debate, and wholly accept the contention of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) that it concerns British Steel. However, that emphasises the sadness we feel that not only is the Secretary of State for Scotland absent from the debate but the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—whose record in connection with the whole sorry story is abysmal. He has shown a determination to wash his hands of the entire situation.

I will not spend very much time analysing what has occurred, because it is more important to consider what we can do for the future of the steel industry and for the United Kingdom economy.

I contend—as I did at the time that British Steel was privatised—that the steel industry has suffered more than any other from ideological conflicts, having been kicked in and out of public ownership no fewer than four or, technically, five times. We argued that the Government should not privatise British Steel as a single entity but instead we have insisted on the creation of another company, with Scottish capacity as its nucleus.

At the time of privatisation, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) tabled an amendment which, had it been adopted, might significantly have altered the future direction of the British steel industry, and that of Scotland in particular might today be in a much healthier state. No one can guarantee that, but such a policy would have created better opportunities.

Those of us who knew before privatisation and, at the time that it occurred, of Bob Scholey's attitude to Scottish steel knew that it was doomed from the moment that British Steel was put in the private sector with him as its chairman. There was no hope from then on. No one can tell me that we are talking about a rational, objective, analytical decision as to the best interests of British Steel and its shareholders, or of the national interest.

As a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry in the earlier part of this Parliament, I cross-examined Sir Bob Scholey, and came to know of the almost pathological response that he makes whenever Scotland and Scottish steel are mentioned. It is not a rational, lucid, or well-argued response, but sheer venom against everything that Scotland and Scottish steel stand for. We have a right to be bitter in the knowledge that the Government knowingly put British Steel into the hands of that man, for we in Scotland knew what would be the consequences of that decision, and attempted to prevent what was almost an inevitable disaster.

I note that the Secretary of State is absent because of his engagement at Buckingham palace with Her Majesty. Sir Bob Scholey seems to suggest that the entire steel strike originated at Ravenscraig—which was a disgraceful slur on its work force, given the contribution that it made to the turnround in British Steel's profits since privatisation. I gained the impression that it would be easier to persuade Attila the Hun to behave with decorum at a royal garden party than to persuade Sir Bob Scholey publicly to acknowledge the contribution made by Scottish steel workers to British steel's productivity, profitability, and his own salary—until it was cut as a result of this year's profits downturn.

A few months ago, I and a number of my hon. Friends met the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to persuade him to accept his obligation, as a supposed promoter of competition, to intervene and to take action. His response was a caricature of what ought to take place in a constructive discussion between Members of Parliament and a Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who claims to be one of the leading thinkers of the free market. For about half an hour, we discussed the Secretary of State's responsibilities to promote steel competition, the importance of competition to British

trade and the country's balance of payments, and the circumstances in which he felt that he had any responsibility to intervene, on the ground either of competition or the national interest.

It was impossible to persuade the right hon. Gentleman to confirm that there were any circumstances in which he would intervene. We asked him what he would do if British Steel's board decided that it was in the shareholders' best interest to shift all the company's production and investment capacity to South Korea, on the ground that it would be more profitable. The right hon. Gentleman said that was a hypothetical question, and one that he was not prepared to address. I hope that it remains a hypothetical question, but one cannot give any guarantee. The Secretary of State's ducking of that question implies that he acknowledges his responsibility, but is not prepared to accept it.

It is still appropriate and relevant to insist—and the Government still have the power to do this—that British Steel disposes of all its Scottish assets as a going concern; to at least attempt to establish whether there exists an alternative bidder who wants to move into the market. When I refer to all the company's assets, I specifically include Hunterston, which offers a long-term attraction as a steel plant that has yet to be developed. It is despicable that British Steel should be allowed to kick out a whole generation of steel workers, yet hang on to a prime plum, which, at some time in the future, it may make the subject of investment or disposal. There may be more alternative bidders now, though if the Government had taken action three or four years ago today's climate might be even more favourable.

The European Community and the treaty of Paris impose certain constraints, but I understand that the action I suggest is entirely within the Government's power and in no way incompatible with the treaty. The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) has left the Chamber, but I may say in response to his remarks that, in reality, the nationalisation of a steel industry or of any plant is irrelevant, because the treaty introduces specific limitations regardless of whether the concern is in the private or public sector. Those who suggest that nationalisation is the answer are being very misleading.

Mr. Sillars: Suppose the hon. Gentleman's hypothetical nightmare became a reality and we found ourselves talking, in the British context—never mind the Scottish context—about shifting all steel production from the United Kingdom to Korea. Would not public ownership prevent that hypothetical nightmare turning into reality? Right hon. and hon. Members can fulminate as much as they like, but the fact remains that we have no control over decision-making in respect of a privatised concern. However, if the steel industry were in public ownership, the situation would be entirely different.

Mr. Bruce: Not as much control as the hon. Gentleman pretends to the Scottish people. He cannot expect Scotland to be an independent sovereign state and a full participating member of the European Community, yet the only one not bound by the treaties that all its other member states have signed. The treaty of Paris is clearly restrictive. On occasions, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) has given the impression that massive investment could be channelled into Scotland's steel sector, regardless of profitability. I believe that that is possible, but the right way forward is to use existing competition policy, and that is entirely within the British Government's domestic power and in accord with the treaty of Paris.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to intervene?

Mr. Bruce: I will not give way on the same point, which I have answered. Neither the hon. Member for Govan nor the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) should promise more than they can realistically deliver.

What of the consequences of British Steel's current decisions? The hon. Member for Rotherham made the pertinent point that the consequences of the contraction of Scotland's steel capacity will almost inevitably be a further loss of market share. That has been past experience. Our concern is that British Steel's reaction to a competitive squeeze will be to continue to contract so that it can make a profit from a smaller and smaller base. However, that strategy is devastatingly wrong for the national interest, and is likely to lead to a severe erosion of Britain's competitiveness and balance of payments.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman, but surely he must realise that British Steel's productivity has soared and that it has invested a great deal in Teesside. I know that Scottish Opposition Members do not like British Steel's investment decisions. However, if there is new investment and if greater productivity is achieved, the industry is not necessarily contracting.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman should look at British Steel's record. It has contracted substantially. It has given up its market share. That has been the standard pattern to date. Some of the steel capacity given up in Scotland has not been replaced elsewhere in terms of the quality of steel on offer. British Steel has made a conscious decision to give up markets. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman is not right. However, it is right to talk about the increase in productivity achieved by British Steel. The greatest increases were achieved in the Scottish steel plants, but little thanks they got for that from the management of British Steel.

The decisions that have already been taken for Lanarkshire have created a major and worsening crisis in Lanarkshire, not just in terms of blight, unemployment and devastation but in terms of community morale. Everything is on a downward spiral. There is lack of hope and no optimism. It is incumbent on the Government to recognise that the scale of resources that is necessary is of a very much larger order than anything that they have yet put forward. The local council estimates that it has 2,000 acres of derelict land and that it will cost £60 million to bring it back into alternative use. It also estimates that the total cost is likely to be about £200 to £300 million. The Government must say where that money is to come from and how it is to be channelled.

The Government seem determined to resolve the future of the new town development corporations in Scotland. It is generally accepted that they have made a great contribution to attracting investment to Scotland and to a style of development that has been extremely successful. Rather than that it should be dissipated, will the Minister consider the creation of a west of Scotland development corporation that could draw on the expertise of the new

[Mr. Bruce]

towns and, in co-operation with the local authorities, be provided with a real estate portfolio and a package of planning and development agreements that would enable it to attract substantial new industry that could bring new hope to the area?

The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) implied that advance factories are necessary. I do not disagree with him, but in many cases custom-built factories for major new projects that can be built quickly on attractive green-field sites are required. We need to identify urgently attractive new sites and also provide for the rehabilitation of derelict land. We shall not succeed if we try to attract prime new investment on to derelict land. No one will wish to invest there. It has to be done in two phases. I hope that the Minister accepts that that is a constructive, sensible and timely proposal.

6.13 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): In Motherwell, we are very conscious of the support that we have enjoyed in all parts of the House for the problems that the industry faces, as well as a readiness to address the problems that we shall face in the future as we enter a period of major industrial change. May I express the thanks of the steel workers and the people of Lanarkshire to the Trade and Industry Select Committee for both this and previous inquiries it has carried out into the affairs of the steel industry. In particular, I wish the Chairman of the Select Committee a speedy recovery from his incapacity.

I pay tribute to the trade union leaders of the Scottish steel plants—in particular to Mr. Tommy Brennan, the chairman of the Ravenscraig joint trade union committee until he was made redundant last Friday—for the magnificent fight that they have led for their industry. It has been, and it always will be, a privilege to work with them.

The effective decisions to close the Scottish steel industry—the Ravenscraig hot mill, the second blast furnace, the Dalzell plate mill, the Clydesdale tube works and, as we may yet learn, the Imperial works and the remaining plants operating at Ravenscraig—were effectively taken by Government Ministers when they decided to privatise British Steel as a monopoly steel producer in the United Kingdom. The Scottish plants were not allowed to compete, as they could have done, by allying them with other plants in a competitive United Kingdom steel industry. They could and should have been allowed to prove their mettle.

The hands that closed the plants were the hairy hands of British Steel, but the voice was that of the Tory Government. It is the Tory party that will long be remembered in Scotland as doing it out of its industrial heritage. The sorry tale of wilful misunderstanding, of deliberate myopia, of cultivated naivety on the part of Ministers is there in the record of Parliament for all to read.

The United Kingdom is now one of the highest priced steel markets in Europe, with cold rolled sheet steeling selling for $460 a tonne, compared with $436 in Belgium and $433 in France. That was reported in the *Financial Times* on Monday of this week. That price difference reflects closely the transport costs from the European Community, a premium that British Steel is able to charge because there is no competing producer in the United Kingdom. As reported today in the *Financial Times*, the European Commission has launched a probe into a suspected cartel of European Community steel producers that restricts the output of hot rolled coil, the biggest single element of which would be the closure of the Ravenscraig hot mill. As for loss of competition within the United Kingdom, we are already hearing complaints from British Steel management that the south Wales steel workers are taking advantage of the easing of competitive pressures from Ravenscraig to raise labour costs in south Wales. Surprise, surprise.

What I am concerned about, however, is not the dismal record of incompetence and betrayal by Ministers that has brought the steel industry in Scotland to its present sad state but where we go from here, if we are to rebuild an industrial base in the heart of Scotland.

As for the steel industry, phase 2 of the Arthur D. Little report, commissioned by the late-lamented Scottish Development Agency, confirmed, as I had suggested and as I have suggested for years, that the best option for Ravenscraig would be as a present generation thick slab producer, phasing into a coil and sheet producer by means of the new thin slab technology route. That would undercut, according to the figures in the Arthur D. Little report, Port Talbot and Llanwern. Without such a development, by the mid-1990s British Steel would be vulnerable to an electric arc mini-mill thin slab producer investing in the United Kingdom.

During the present recession, it is no use talking to British Steel about new technology, but its view in two years could be rather different, as British Steel pulls out of the recession under a new chairman. If British Steel management has an ounce of sense it will lash Black Bob Odysseus to the mast so that he will not follow the behest of the siren voices in the City luring him into the premature closure of what remains of Ravenscraig. That could close, for British Steel, a valuable route into new technology and put it at a serious competitive disadvantage. Furthermore, it would cost more money.

As for selling the hot mill to the Chinese, who are visiting Ravenscraig this weekend, there are components of the mill and its ancillary plant that could be used to save money in terms of building the new technology mill that would accompany thin slab casting. If the haste to sell the hot mill to the Chinese is an attempt to stop the development of a new technology mill, it will not work. That will not be the decisive factor.

Only this week, British Steel announced that it has taken the strategic decision to build a new plate mill on Teesside to replace the old Dalzell and Scunthorpe plate mills. I say to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who represents my former constituency on Teesside, that if I had £400 million to spend on Teesside—which is a long-suffering community—I would spend it not on a plate mill, but on new materials production, whether from British Steel or from ICI, and I would not put the money into obsolescent technology as British Steel proposes to do. Rather than replace——

Mr. Devlin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Although the debate centralises itself entirely on the steel industry, there is an immense amount of investment going on in a wide range of other industries, many of which were not there when he represented that part of the country. We

must not look at this purely in isolation and say that Teesside is investing in old technology; it is very much investing in new technology.

Dr. Bray: I look forward to debating the economy of Teesside with the hon. Gentleman in the future, but I think that he is wrong in his analysis.

With retained profits in British Steel cut from £399 million last year to £18 million this year, and interest rates in the United Kingdom the second highest in the industrial world, I do not know where British Steel will get the extra £300 million that it will need for the more expensive option of building a new plate mill on Teesside, rather than developing the Dalzell mill.

British Steel says that it is thinking of customers well into the next century. By then, and before building a plate mill on Teesside with obsolescent technology, it may be induced to spell out its arithmetic to shareholders and investment analysts who, it seems to think, are as credulous as Tory Ministers. If shareholders are that dumb, a Labour Government will have to tighten up the competition and company rules to make management more accountable. In Scotland we are not convinced. We demand that British Steel justify its plate strategy because we believe that the answers will come out in support of the redevelopment of the Dalzell mill.

I will address myself to the hard competitive, commercial realities where the customer rules because that is the world in which my constituents have always lived and worked. If they had merely pleaded social need, the community would have been swept away many years ago. The House should not confuse a determination to perform with a blindness to social need or a lack of community loyalty. It is that that is demanding effective action now to allow Lanarkshire, and Motherwell in particular, to continue to earn its living as it has always done.

The closures that have already taken place in steel and the undoubted difficulties and uncertainty of saving anything that remains in the Scottish steel plants means that the Government must now act decisively to lay the foundations for a new industrial economy in Motherwell in particular, and in Lanarkshire in general. Of the 14,700 jobs in steel in the Motherwell district in 1974, only 1,500 will remain when already announced closures have taken effect. The remainder will go if the last blast furnace in Ravenscraig is closed in 1994, as foreshadowed by British Steel.

The measures announced by the Government to attract new industry are totally inadequate, and were in the pipeline long before the steel closures were announced. Even the location of the freight terminal for Scotland at Mossend is still in doubt. We need an enterprise zone in Motherwell and the redevelopment of the steel sites, which from past closures form a great gaping hole in the heart of Motherwell. As long as they are left as a wilderness of dereliction, any lesser development measures elsewhere will be ineffectively cosmetic.

The opportunity provided by the new electrified InterCity rail service starting next Monday between Glasgow and Edinburgh should be taken. The plans and investment were made long ago, and the service had already been commissioned. The trains will stop only in Motherwell, so the opportunity should be taken to turn Motherwell into the kind of business satellite to the Scottish city centres that Croydon is to London.

I welcome the tone of the contribution made by the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) who urged the necessity and practicality of getting on with initiatives of real vision to create a new image for Motherwell. The main line between Glasgow, Edinburgh and London passes the steel sites where land has been in the ownership of the Scottish Development Agency for 10 years—throughout the lifetime of the Government—but nothing has been done about it. That land is available for a new main line station, which would be the only one in Scotland with ample car parking and development land adjacent to it.

The necessary design concept for a new millenium Motherwell new town on the former steel sites could be made the subject of a fully-fledged architectural competition. It would be a challenge to produce a design as civilised as Edinburgh new town, and as attractive to private development capital. In one sense, it would change the image of Motherwell. In another, it would confirm it as the contemporary industrial heart of Scotland, which has been demonstrated so magnificently in the fight for steel. That fight was not a fight for a smokestack industry. It was a fight for the industrial soul of a nation, reborn on the threshold of the new millenium. It is a fight that we shall win.

6.26 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): There is a sense of deja vu here today—[HON. MEMBERS: "You."] Indeed. I am speaking, and the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) has spoken. My hon. Friend the Minister hopes to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) has just spoken. All of us spoke in a debate on 16 December 1980. It is worth our while refreshing our memories about what we said then. It is just as well that few of us ever bother to take the trouble to find out what we said in this Chamber in a particular debate on a particular subject that crops up a decade later. However, I will remind the House of what some of us said then, because there are lessons today for the future of the Scottish steel industry which we can learn by looking back to 10 years ago.

The debate on 16 December 1980 arose because the then chairman of the British Steel Corporation, Mr. Ian MacGregor, laid before the Secretary of State, who presented it to Parliament, a restructuring plan for the steel industry. The House will recall that in those days my constituency was called Brigg and Scunthorpe, and included the town of Scunthorpe, which is now represented by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). In those days, one afternoon I received a telephone call from Mr. MacGregor to tell me that he would announce the following day redundancies totalling 4,100 in my constituency alone. Although a great deal of concern was shown about the MacGregor proposals by Opposition Front-Bench Members—and I am glad of that—and although they initiated a debate, when we talked about 4,100 redundancies in one town in England, there was not the type of concern that is being expressed today about Ravenscraig. Although I recognise that it is entirely right and proper for the House to devote itself today to the importance of Ravenscraig and its future, the size of the steel industry in Scunthorpe then was far greater than that in Ravenscraig today. I do not seem to recall receiving the same support when I advocated

[Mr. Michael Brown]

enterprise zones, development area status and the rest of it, which I fully acknowledge need to be considered in a debate such as this.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I think that it is only fair to the House if I press on. I am normally very generous about giving way, but I shall not do so on this occasion because I want to complete my speech fairly quickly.

I am sure that if the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will rightly and legitimately draw to the attention of the House British Steel's recent announcement about the plate mills in Dalzell and in Scunthorpe, the large town right on my constituency boundary. From the best of intentions, and for the best of reasons, the hon. Gentleman will want to submit to British Steel his case as to why the Scunthorpe mill should not be closed. Ten years ago, I was in exactly the same position that he is in today: I had to face the difficulty of representing a constituency in which large numbers of redundancies had been announced. I would caution him that, although the temptation simply to lobby the company concerned to protect and preserve those jobs is eminently understandable, that is too easy a road to take, and, rightly or wrongly, I resisted that temptation in 1980. In the 1983 general election, my constituency boundaries had changed, so I cannot honestly say that the views that I had expressed in the House were endorsed at that election. I can only point out that a Conservative Member was elected to Glanford and Scunthorpe at the 1983 general election.

I submit that we can do the industry a favour only if we ensure that at all times it answers to profit; that applies as much to the privatised steel industry in 1991 as it did to the nationalised steel industry in 1980. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Oh yes. The industry should answer to profit generated as a result of the demand for its product. Opposition Members make noises, as if to suggest that that assertion is wrong. I remind them that the motion before the House in 1980, which they themselves tabled, mentioned the word "profit". They did not deny—my goodness, how could they deny—the importance of profit.

We must remember that, in 1980, the steel industry came to the House and the taxpayer to ask for £1·7 billion —that being the loss made in that year. The hon. Member for Rotherham sneeringly said that British Steel's recently produced figures showed a massive reduction in its profits. I remind the hon. Gentleman, who spoke in the debate on 16 December 1980, that we were then talking not about a reduction in profit but about the British Steel Corporation losing £50 million every single month of that year. That was the scale of the disaster. Everyone recognised then that, even though the industry was nationalised, its future would be secured only if we got rid of the begging-bowl approach.

It is only fair to draw to the attention of the House the memorandum submitted to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry by the chairman of British Steel which appears in the minutes of evidence. Much criticism has, in my view quite wrongly, fallen upon Sir Bob Scholey, who has done a great job in securing both the well-being of the steel industry in the 1980s and its future for the 1990s.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I will not give way. I no longer represent a steel constituency, and it would not be fair for me to speak for too long. I want to press on because I want the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, in particular, to have the opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The memorandum submitted to the Select Committee by the chairman of British Steel states:

"The company . . . has clear legal and moral responsibilities towards our shareholders for the financial success of the business. That depends absolutely on maintaining international competitiveness. I emphasised this issue in my letter of 14th June to the Secretary of State for Scotland, which was made public, on the reasons for the Company's decision to close the Ravenscraig hot strip mill. I said on that occasion:

'I must first say, and formally, that we live in a highly competitive world in steel and there is a clear sensitivity both in terms of share prices and from the international competition standpoint that prevents British Steel as a private company from disclosing quantitative information relating to matters of a commercial nature, or which are profit-sensitive.'

If we do not succeed in the increasingly competitive international market place we shall fail not only in our responsibilities towards our shareholders, but also towards our employees, for jobs depend totally on the maintenance of a viable business."

That is the bottom line. Whether we are debating the British Steel Corporation in 1980 or British Steel plc in 1991, the only thing that matters is whether British Steel can sell its products and be internationally competitive.

Dr. Bray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Browne: I am afraid that I will not give way. You know what I am like, Mr. Deputy Speaker: once I go down a highway or byway, I detain the House for a further 10 or 15 minutes, and I am determined not to do that.

I simply want to make this point to hon. Members who have the interests of Ravenscraig at heart, be they Conservative, Liberal or Labour. When I became a Member of Parliament, I represented a constituency in which 20,000 people worked in the steel industry. The Labour Government of 1978-79 could not defend the jobs—even by recourse to the taxpayer, the printing presses and massive public borrowing. Even they sacked 1,700 workers in 1979. It was Labour politicians—specifically the Secretary of State for Industry—who told British Steel that it would have to sack those people.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) was right in what he said about the role of the European Commission—whether British steel is in public or private hands. The restructuring that was necessary in 1980-81 was largely the result of the European Coal and Steel Community requirement of the time. From the point of view of policy, the Government recognised that they could not lose £50 million of taxpayers' money. Then, we had a secure future for the steel industry, but steel is always out there in the international marketplace; the industry is always vulnerable to imports, and the extent to which imports are coming into Britain has been mentioned. If the Government have a responsibility, it is to ensure that our products can compete in the international marketplace and that aim can be secured only if the relationship between the pound and other currencies is not allowed unduly to handicap British industry. That is code for

expressing my views on the point that we have reached in the debate about European monetary union and the European monetary system.

If the Government are to assist the steel industry, they must examine once again the relationship between our currency and the German currency. That will give us the opportunity to ensure that our industry is competitive. But we cannot insulate the steel industry from the cold facts of international competition in 1991, any more than we could in 1980. By trying hard, for understandable constituency reasons, to protect, in the short term, part of the steel industry that is simply no longer viable, we shall do the industry a disservice in the long term. In essence, those are the words not of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes in 1991 but of the hon. Member for Brigg and Scunthorpe in 1980. Those words are engraved on my heart. I remember Labour Members saying then, "You are not representing your constituency." They said that I should simply save an old out-of-date rundown plant. I refused to do that. However, a Conservative Member of Parliament was elected to represent the area at the following general election.

6.39 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Out of courtesy to my colleagues who are anxious to speak, I intend to be brief. I am particluarly grateful for the references to Gartcosh and to the lessons that we have tried to learn. I am also grateful for the references to the Imperial works, Airdrie, in the constituency of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) because many of my constituents work there. We are very concerned about the consequences of the closures and redundancies at Ravenscraig, Clydesdale and Dalzell and we want the lessons that we have tried to learn from Gartcosh to be relevant to this debate.

We are debating a Select Committee report that made seven recommendations. So far the Government have reluctantly accepted only one—that we should have a debate on the subject today.

We should remind the Government that the consequences of their obsession with privatisation has meant devastation in Monklands and in Strathkelvin. That obsession has cost us much in human terms throughout Lanarkshire and certainly in Motherwell, as the moving speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) testified. In the light of the Select Committee's report, we are entitled to say that the Government cannot simply abdicate their responsibilities. In the absence of the Secretary of State, I shall raise several points with the Minister in the hope that he will respond to them.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East and I believe that the hundreds of people struggling at the Imperial works, as so many did in Ravenscraig and Dalzell, should make their contribution to the steel industry. Their commitment to the industry should not be taken lightly. British Steel is not terribly forthcoming about its accounts and is worried about the £15 million allocated for exceptional items. Does that mean redundancies? What role does British Steel have for Imperial?

The import of tubes into Scotland for the North sea is scandalous. The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) cannot disguise the anger of many people in Scotland. British Steel is prepared to import 70 per cent of its pipes from Japan, Germany, Italy and France when our people are desperately keen to make a contribution. No one can deny our balance of payments problems, but those imports amount to a £67 million a year loss to the balance of payments. Where is the sense in that? Where is the sense in allowing a small minority of people the right to take decisions that are so crucial to all our people, not just to the shareholders? British Steel is taking decisions which mean that British men, mills and machinery will stand idle. British Steel will not accept the consequences of the decisions that it has taken in Lanarkshire.

What is the answer to what has happened at Gartcosh? The decision was taken more than five years ago. Some people thought at the time that the Freightliner site, which we support today for Mossend, might have been given to Gartcosh and Coatbridge. That has not happened. We have great hopes for the paper recycling plant, as the Minister is aware, but we should see a great deal more energy from Scottish Enterprise to ensure that that becomes a reality.

The announcement—in so far as it was an announcement—in today's *Scotsman* about site clearance is of the utmost importance to Monklands and Strathkelvin. It seems that the steel masters settled in Lanarkshire, made profits and then disappeared, leaving our local councils and communities with enormous problems especially with regard to site dereliction.

More than 85 per cent. of the derelict land in Lanarkshire is in my district. Twelve per cent. of Monklands is derelict. We cannot deal with such problems on our own. It is profoundly unacceptable, if not immoral, for British Steel to make the kind of statement that it made this morning. We demand regeneration and British Steel should believe that it has a contribution to make, as should the Government.

The Prime Minister made what he described as a major statement in Perth. The working party estimates that £300 million will be required for the regeneration of Lanarkshire. Only £120 million has been provided so far and most of that has already been allocated—even before we learnt of the Dalzell closure.

We in Lanarkshire, in Monklands and in Strathkelvin, believe that we still have a contribution to make to the economy of Scotland and that no one has the right to prevent us from making that contribution. The spectre of unemployment, deprivation and poverty in Lanarkshire is completely unacceptable. I received a letter recently from a doctor in one of our local health centres. The Minister should be aware of the concerns in Lanarkshire. The doctor wrote:

"The answer to heart disease"——

which, incidentally, in Monklands is 3 per cent. above the United Kingdom average—

"will not lie with doctors and drugs but with proper public health policy on unemployment, poor housing and the lifestyle of poverty."

Nowhere in the Government's approach so far, including their disgraceful and lukewarm response to the Select Committee's report and their influence on the Lanarkshire working party, have they been prepared to accept the consequences of their free market decisions. Because of that, our determination to fight for what remains of the steel industry and to fight for Lanarkshire and Scotland will remain and will be increasingly apparent.

6.48 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Secretary of State for Scotland is seeking refuge in Holyrood palace, but he sent along some court jesters to hold the fort, including the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) and the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). When the full extent of the Secretary of State's involvement in recent closure decisions in Scottish steel becomes known, he will be seeking refuge in Edinburgh castle, not Holyrood palace. I suspect a tapestry of deceit with regard to Scottish steel from the Conservative party stretching up to and including the Prime Minister's office.

If the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes wants to consider the real pattern of developments in British Steel throughout the 1980s, he need look no further than table 1 of the Select Committee report which charts the investment pattern year after year, throughout the 1980s, when tens of millions, indeed hundreds of millions, of pounds were sent to Teesside, Lackenby, Llanwern and Port Talbot while the Scottish plants were starved of investment.

We have had three Secretaries of State for Scotland during that period——

Mr. Devlin *rose*——

Mr. Salmond: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has only just come into the Chamber.

There have been three Secretaries of State for Scotland in that period and each has failed the Scottish people. The right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) intervened in the early 1980s and received some plaudits in Scotland for, as he put it, "saving Ravenscraig". However, he failed to change British Steel's investment pattern, thus leaving Ravenscraig exposed and vulnerable as the decade wore on.

This time last year, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) was engaged in a public dispute with Robert Scholey, the chairman of British Steel, and was asking for explanations about why the strip mill was to close. However, despite the warnings that were given by hon. Members of all parties about the consequences of delivering unfettered the Scottish steel plants into the hands of their enemies—as a result of privatisation—it was the same right hon. and learned Gentleman who refused to alter the terms of the privatisation to give the Scottish industry even a chance of success in the future. That position was not argued only by the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats or by some Labour Members; it was argued also by non-political bodies such as the Scottish Council (Development and Industry). The writing was clearly on the wall when British Steel was delivered into the private hands of an anti-Scottish management.

It is ironic to look back to the speeches that were made by Conservatives, including the Minister responsible for industry in Scotland, arguing that privatisation would strengthen Ravenscraig within British Steel. What empty rhetoric that now looks. What of the seven-year production pledge that was much vaunted as secure during the privatisation? At best, it is meaningless and, at worst, it has given the Scottish steel industry a defined time scale for its death sentence.

However disreputable the performance of the two previous Secretaries of State for Scotland, they cannot match that of the present Secretary of State. The involvement of the right hon. Member for Ayr was short-term and superficial. The right hon. and learned Member for Pentlands went through the motions and played for time, without having any real effect. However, the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) has been engaged in a cynical game of publicly supporting the steel industry while privately capitulating in his meetings with British Steel.

As time is short, I shall give only two examples of the performance of that right hon. Gentleman, who is absent from the Chamber this evening. Page XIV of the Select Committee's report refers to "uncertainty" in British Steel's evidence about why it was refusing to sell the Scottish plant. At one point, it was said that British Steel would not sell the plant because nobody wanted it, but at another point the evidence suggests that British Steel would not sell the plant because nobody wanted it, but at another point the evidence suggests that British Steel would not sell the plant because that would be detrimental to its interests, implying that if any other company had been able to buy it would lose in competition to that entrant company. However, the reason on which British Steel settled was that the Commission would stop such a sale. As Robert Scholey put it, the Commission would be

"jumping out of its skin"

if British Steel tried to sell Ravenscraig or the other Scottish plants.

The Select Committee dismissed that evidence because of letters to the contrary from the Commission. The Secretary of State for Scotland had even more insight into the evidence because on 25 March he met Sir Leon Brittan, the European Commissioner, and was told not only that the European Commission would not stop the sale of Ravenscraig, but that Robert Scholey himself knew that he had "gone too far" when he appeared before the Select Committee. In other words, the Secretary of State had been told that the chairman of British Steel had acknowledged that his evidence misled the Committee.

One might think that, having been given that information, the Secretary of State for Scotland would return to Scotland, hold a press conference, summon the chairman of British Steel—or be summoned by him—or demand that Robert Scholey be recalled to the Select Committee, but the Secretary of State said nothing for four weeks until the evidence was made public—just as he has said nothing in the past four weeks since he has known about the closure of the Dalzell plate mill.

We now move on to a new phase, in which the Minister responsible for industry in Scotland is very much involved. In April, the Minister released a Scottish Office document supporting the case for investment in Dalzell. That was done with full knowledge of its public implications. If there was any doubt about that, *The Sunday Times* in Scotland——

Mr. Allan Stewart: It was done specifically in response to a request from the trade unions.

Mr. Salmond: It was done to nail the Minister's flag to the mast of supporting the Dalzell investment. If that was to have any effect, it should have been backed by other action. If there was any doubt about that, *The Sunday Times* in Scotland, which is hardly a paper against the Conservative interest, could have told the Government about it at the time because it argued:

"Unless there is a break with precedent, the Scholey formula of solemnly taking arguments into account, weighing them in the balance, finding them wanting and then failing to say why, will rule the day."

The Minister must have known that his gesture would have no effect unless it was backed by some other action that would put pressure on British Steel.

On 4 June the Secretary of State for Scotland had a private meeting with Bob Scholey. As the right hon. Gentleman is not in his place, we cannot question him about exactly what was said, but I can tell the House his response according to a Scottish Office briefing on the meeting. When told of the closure of the Dalzell plate mill, against the advice of the Scottish Office which was submitted to British Steel, the Secretary of State said:

"You know my view that the management of British Steel is entirely a matter for you, subject of course to competition law".

The right hon. Gentleman did not even follow the performance of his predecessor by questioning the decision and arguing that more information should come to light. At that meeting the right hon. Gentleman immediately accepted British Steel's decision. That was on the very same day as the Prime Minister wrote to the Dalzell shop stewards stating his "full support":

"The trade union paper, 'The Mill, The Skill, and the Will' and the Scottish Office paper on the single plate strategy demonstrate that the case merits careful appraisal by British Steel."

Perhaps the Minister will tell us more, but we are expected to believe that, having capitulated immediately to British Steel's decision, the Secretary of State for Scotland ran to No. 10 Downing street but was too late to stop the post, which meant that that public endorsement was sent to the Dalzell shop stewards.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman's quotation from the Prime Minister's letter gives a rather misleading impression of what the Prime Minister actually said. He certainly referred to "The Mill, the Skill and the Will" and to the Scottish Office paper on a single plate strategy, but he said:

"It demonstrates the case merits careful appraisal by British Steel along with any other options the company may be considering."

Mr. Salmond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. My point is that the letter was designed to give public support to the Dalzell shop stewards. A full two weeks later, on 19 June—that is two weeks after the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Prime Minister knew about British Steel's decision—on a public platform with the Dalzell shop stewards, the president of the Conservative and Unionist Association argued:

"Major's backing of the view is something which I really do not believe that British Steel can afford to ignore."

The public impression was clear—that the Prime Minister's involvement and support would be decisive in helping the Dalzell shop stewards' case. Privately, however, at his meeting with Bob Scholey, the Secretary of State for Scotland immediately capitulated to British Steel's decision without any questioning or argument, merely saying that it was "entirely a matter" for the company. That is the extent of the Conservative party's treatment of Scotland. The Government publicly support the workers north of the border, while privately selling them down the river in London. That is the Conservative party's position on the Scottish steel industry. It is little wonder that the Secretary of State was prudent enough to remain at a garden party this evening.

I contest the opinion of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) that the position is irreversible and that nothing can be done. It is apposite to do so because the many positive and fruitful ideas that have been produced this evening depend on some action being taken to release those assets from the maw and the grip of British Steel. Having given his endorsement to the Dalzell shop stewards, is not the Prime Minister honour-bound to act to secure the release of those assets and allow someone else to run them properly? Is he not honour-bound to follow up his words with actions and stop that exercise of monopoly power?

The Labour party is also on the spot. Earlier, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) argued that public ownership was not an option under the treaty of Paris. He then went against his own argument by saying that Scottish steel was profitable and productive, which means that it would not be a problem under the terms of the treaty of Paris. If we are to exercise any influence in the decision-making of British Steel, there must be a threat that, unless it stops destroying its Scottish plants, something will be done.

One would have thought that the Labour party would have argued the case for public investment in an industry that is too important to be left in the hands of someone like Robert Scholey. However, the Labour party has made no attempt to examine the issues, and it has not said what it will do if there is a change of Government. Both Ravenscraig and Dalzell are profitable and productive. Even the Scottish Office Minister believes that British Steel would save £300 million by adopting the Dalzell option. That is the figure given in the Scottish Office paper. British Steel owns the assets, but it has no arbitrary authority over them. They were created within the public sector. Billions of pounds of debt were written off before the company went into the private sector. Does British Steel have the right to destroy those assets, despite their production potential?

There is a vital difference between the current closure plans and those that have gone before: a general election will intervene before the closures take effect. There is a clear realisation of the process of destruction in which British Steel has engaged in Scotland. One immediate reaction to the news last Tuesday came from Bishop Joseph Devine of Motherwell, who said on BBC television:

"It is quite appalling what has happened here, as one is seeing the systematic dismantling of steel making in Scotland. Why British Steel can still continue to be called British Steel escapes me. It's clearly now English Steel."

The Glasgow *Evening Times* said:

"The politicians, charged with the responsibility of protecting the people of Lanarkshire, have miserably failed them. Margaret Thatcher, George Younger, Malcolm Rifkind, and now John Major and Ian Lang are on that roll of infamy. Labour's heirarchy are no better.

Neil Kinnock even yesterday still couldn't bring himself to back Dalzell because he knows every steel job lost in Scotland —his political power base—is a job safe in Wales or Teesside.

With friends like these, who needs enemies? They are all guilty of watching a crime against the nation being perpetrated—and doing nothing to stop it."

[Mr. Salmond]

There will be an opportunity at the general election to change the political climate and environment that have allowed British Steel to destroy its Scottish industry. I believe that the Scottish people will take that opportunity.

7.3 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): This debate is supposed to be about the future of the steel industry; it is supposed to be an opportunity to think about where the industry is going. It is fortunate—or, perhaps, unfortunate—that it coincides with the publication of British Steel's annual report, which casts doubt on the future of the two plate mills at Dalzell and Scunthorpe.

I wish to correct a couple of points made by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). Although I was not in the House in 1980, I have read the *Hansard* report of the debate at that time on a motion about the indifference shown towards Britain's manufacturing base, the decline of its industrial base, and the loss of jobs and investment. That motion is as relevant today as it was in 1980 because the Government are still indifferent towards our manufacturing base. That is shown by their attitude towards British Steel.

I do not argue for the retention of the Scunthorpe plate mill. It would make no sense to argue for a plate mill that is becoming obsolescent, that will not be able to meet the new quality standards that will be dictated in European markets, and that cannot embrace the new thin plate technology. Of course, I want the new plate mill investment to come to Scunthorpe, which has a very strong social and economic case for it, but I will not attack other parts of the country where jobs will be affected. I will not be caught up in the divisiveness that the Government often encourage. I believe that the work forces of all the existing steel plants in the country have made enormous sacrifices through increased productivity. All of them are in profit, and all deserve consideration.

As hon. Members would expect, I want to make the case for Scunthorpe. As the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes said, Scunthorpe has had enormous job losses since the early 1980s, when about 20,000 people were employed in the steel industry. The figure is now down to 7,500. In addition to the 500 job losses that will occur if the plate mill closes, it has been announced that some 800 other jobs are to go. There will also be job losses in craft restructuring.

Since the privatisation of British Steel, it has been difficult to obtain information about its plans. I do not criticise the local works manager, who has been helpful. We have a good relationship and we meet regularly. All Members of Parliament have connections with local industry, so we have an idea of what is happening and of the trends. For some months it has been clear that Teesside has been the favoured site for a plate mill, if that investment is confirmed. It is worth emphasising that the report says that any plans for a plate mill will have to be confirmed. Given the economic climate, I suspect that it could be many years before a start is made on a new plate mill at Teesside, yet both Scunthorpe and Dalzell face closure.

This debate should be about more than Scunthorpe and Dalzell; it should be about British Steel and its future plans. Together with other Labour Members, I strongly opposed privatisation. What have the public—the taxpayers and the local workers—got out of privatisation? Certainly, those who were encouraged to buy shares did not get a great deal because the shares have done very little. I accept that, at the time, it was pointed out that the steel industry is cyclical and prone to booms and slumps. There was tremendous investment in the industry when it was in public ownership, yet when it was privatised debts of almost £5 billion were written off. It was virtually given away, with the benefit of all the public expenditure. Because of that, I believe that the Government have the right to ask British Steel about its plans. They have the right to ask British Steel to show some consideration for the work forces and communities, such as mine in Scunthorpe, who paid for that productivity with their jobs, sometimes with their health, and sometimes even with their lives.

In the end, the judgment on where British Steel is going depends on its investment programme and policy. I find it strange that investment in the Scunthorpe works has been concentrated on the heavy end—the production of liquid steel. Indeed, because of the relining and rebuilding of two of the four blast furnaces, with the rebuilding of a third to come, Scunthorpe is capable of producing an additional 10,000 tonnes of liquid steel.

However, if Scunthorpe loses its plate mill, it will also lose the demand for 14,000 tonnes of liquid steel. We have a steelworks with the capacity for a new plate mill that could be left with an excess capacity of 24,000 tonnes. Where is that excess capacity to go? It cannot go to Teesside; Teesside has an existing commitment relating not only to output of liquid steel for its own use, but to output for the use of other steel works.

As some hon. Members have pointed out, British Steel has a tendency to retrench—to slim down, and to attempt to maximise output while returning to the minimum plant size. Of course, British Steel must operate in a commercial market place, both domestically and abroad. If it slims down and retrenches too much, however, how will it meet demand when it increases, as we hope that it will? Will not imports undermine its market share?

Let me ask two questions. First, will the Minister assure the House that the Government will use what influence they have—I accept that that influence has diminished considerably since privatisation—to press British Steel to ensure that investment is increased, especially "upstream" investment in plants such as the one at Scunthorpe? The history of steel privatisation is not good. When it was first privatised, very little investment went into the plants; the new owners substituted a coat of paint for the purchase of new plant, equipment and technology. Such investment is vital if we are to have a viable steel industry, and to meet strategic and economic needs.

My second point is this. Towns such as Scunthorpe have received some help because of the drastic job losses that they have experienced. Although that help is much appreciated, I emphasise that the Government have a responsibility: ultimately, the downturn in demand is due to their mismanagement of the economy, and their engineering of two recessions in the past decade. They have a duty to help Glanford and Scunthorpe, and other towns in the same position. Local authorities in such towns have had considerable success in attracting new industry and investment; but we are competing increasingly with other parts of the country—and, indeed, with other parts of Europe.

Areas such as Glanford and Scunthorpe have a great deal to offer. My local work force has proved its commitment to British Steel in terms of efficiency. The fact that the Scunthorpe plant holds the national steel production record is a source of great pride to a work force that has devoted so much time and energy to improving productivity. That plant deserves some consideration from British Steel; and, at this time of increasing unemployment, I believe that the Government should give my constituency a degree of priority by means of DTI grants and by working with the local councils that are doing so much to promote Scunthorpe and widen its employment base.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I call Mr. Allan Stewart.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you explain how it is in order, in a debate that is primarily concerned with the Clydesdale tube works and the Ravenscraig plant, for the Member of Parliament representing the area involved not to be able to catch your eye?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I realise that the hon. Gentleman is one of a number who have been disappointed this evening. I can only regret that. This is a short debate and, unfortunately, some of the speeches have been too long.

Dr. Reid *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point of order. I suggest that he may find it fruitful to intervene on the Minister's speech.

Dr. Reid: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are wasting time. I call the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

Dr. Reid: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have no doubt that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will give way, as he has always been generous in that regard, but I do not wish to intervene on his speech. I did not ask about other hon. Members who might want to speak; I asked a specific question. How can it be in order for a debate to be held on the subject of the Clydesdale tube works without the local Member of Parliament being able to catch your eye?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can add nothing to what I have already said.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I confirm that I shall be glad to give way to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) if he wishes to intervene at an appropriate point.

I welcome the opportunity to explain the Government's position on the steel industry, particularly in Scotland, and on the measures for the regeneration of Lanarkshire. First, let me pay tribute to the work of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry in investigating the closures in the Scottish steel industry. The House is agreed that the Committee has carried out a thorough investigation, which has given us all a better insight into the background and implications of those closures. Let me also join other hon. Members in wishing my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) a speedy return to good health and the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) rightly set the debate in the framework of the European Coal and Steel Community provisions. He was right to emphasise that not only the Committee's conclusion but the very process of taking evidence, has been illuminating. I shall refer later to what was said by another Committee member, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther).

A number of hon. Members who have spoken, including the hon. Members for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), represent communities that are directly affected by the plant closures. It was a pity that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—somewhat uncharacteristically—began by criticising my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for being absent. Surely he knows that the arrangement has always been for the Secretary of State for Scotland to accompany Her Majesty on official visits to Scotland—just as the Secretary of State for Wales accompanies her in Wales and the Secretary of State for Defence accompanies her on visits to defence establishments.

I address the hon. Member for Garscadden more in sorrow than in anger. However, I entirely reject the allegations of collusion and ill faith made, on the basis of no evidence, by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). Such allegations by the Scottish National party highlight the difference between its attitude to Scotland's steel problems and that of the Labour party. My impression is that Labour Members have been concerned primarily with jobs, while SNP Members, all too often, have been concerned primarily with headlines.

Mr. Salmond: Was the Minister present at the meeting on 4 June between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the chairman of British Steel? Is it true that, in response to the announcement of the Dalzell closure, the Secretary of State said:

"You know my view that the management of British Steel is entirely a matter for you, subject of course to competition law"?

Mr. Stewart: I certainly confirm that I was present at that meeting. Over a long period, the Scottish Office has asked British Steel to consider Dalzell's case, and we presented a paper to British Steel arguing that case. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan alleged that there was some kind of collusion or ill faith in my decision to publish that Scottish Office document. I published it in response to a specific request by the Dalzell trade unions. I held no press conference about it but gave the document to the trade unions so that they could use it as they wished. Therefore, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his allegations.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: Does the hon. Gentleman withdraw his allegations? I shall not give way—the hon. Gentleman can simply say, "Yes."

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister answer my second question?

Mr. Stewart: I shall answer it if the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment to do so.

At that meeting with the chairman of British Steel and some of his colleagues, we were told, in total commercial confidentiality, of the decision in relation to Dalzell. We pointed out that we had argued Dalzell's case over a long period, and we expressed extreme disappointment at the news that had been brought to us. We asked for confirmation that the board had fully considered the Scottish Office document, and we were assured that it had carefully considered every option and had come to the conclusion to invest on Teesside.

If the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is suggesting that we should, somehow, have released that information to the public, that would have been a breach of faith and trust. As for his allegation about the president of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association and subsequent statements, he was not at that meeting.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have specifically asked the Minister twice about the response to Bob Scholey's news—is it correct?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Stewart: I have already answered that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Although no one doubts that the concern of the hon. Member for Garscadden is genuine, when I asked him what he would have done differently in the past year had he been Secretary of State for Scotland, his reply was not convincing. The essence of his reply was that he would have resigned.

Dr. Reid: I shall go back on my word and take the opportunity to intervene on the Minister. The position has been made absolutely clear by my hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on numerous occasions. First, there would have been an interventionist Department of Trade and Industry. Secondly, there would have been a strengthened Monopolies and Mergers Commission, to which British Steel would have been taken. Thirdly, there would have been joint ventures with British Steel in new technology, which are legal under both treaties in Europe. Fourthly, research assistance would have been channelled to British Steel in terms of moneys for research and development. Again, that would have been legal under European legislation. I give the Minister merely four or five measures that a Labour Government would have taken in the past two years for Ravenscraig and Clydesdale.

The great tragedy is that Bob Scholey is well aware of what a Labour Government would do had the plants remained. With the prospect of a Labour Government, he has run his timetable one to two years ahead and ordered an army with a scorched earth policy to remove the hot strip mill and the steel works at Clydesdale, so that none of that can be done in a year's time.

Mr. Stewart: Who would have funded that plan? The Government could not have done so because state aid for steel is closely circumscribed by European Community coal and steel regulations. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that a Labour Government would direct the steel industry and force it to invest against its commercial judgment, he should tell the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that that will be Labour's policy, so that he can make it clear to the City.

Dr. Reid: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: No, I must get on with the general debate.

Scotland's steel industry has a long and honourable history. Together with other traditional industries such as shipbuilding and coal mining, it has attracted a deep attachment from the Scottish people. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have emphasised that the workers in the industry have served it well, and it is a matter of deep regret that they do not face a more promising future. However, the factors shaping that future do not lie entirely within the control of the company or the Government. International competition grows ever more intensive. In his positive speech, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) put the matter properly into perspective.

It is true that, since 1981, employment in British Steel and ECSC products has dropped by 45 per cent. But there has been an equivalent drop of 52 per cent. in France, 57 per cent. in Spain and 42 per cent. in the European Community generally. The whole industry has had to readjust to changing circumstances.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I should like to make a little more progress.

I emphasise the importance of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). British Steel has been transformed from a company that made a loss of nearly £5 million of taxpayers' money a day into a profitable company. Its productivity has also been transformed. It must be right to allow British Steel to compete and to continue to put poor productivity and the subsidies of the past behind it.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Secretary of State explain his policy of asking help from other parts of the Government? I was at a meeting at which the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), when Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, said that his Department was making no efforts to help the campaign to save the Scottish steel industry because it had not been asked to do so by the Scottish Office. It is difficult to understand why, if the Scottish Office is as committed to the campaign as the Minister says, the Department of Trade and Industry —which is responsible for steel—was not being involved in the campaign because the Scottish Office had not specifically asked for its help.

Mr. Stewart: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the policies, statements and representations made by my right hon. Friend and successive Secretaries of State have had the full support of the whole Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) was right to emphasise that the work force, faced with the proposal to close the hot strip mill, were entitled to as full an explanation as possible of the basis for that decision. My right hon. Friend and I have continually urged British Steel to release as much information as possible about the company's position, consistent with the need to safeguard commercially sensitive information. We

have continually urged British Steel to consider fully and carefully any potential opportunities that might be identified in relation to their Scottish assets.

The European Community's regional policy and how it relates to the sale of the hot strip mill has been discussed. I would tell the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan that on 25 March Sir Leon Brittan told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that Sir Robert Scholey had wrongly told the Select Committee that the Commission would object to the sale of the strip mill. The Secretary of State had written to Sir Robert Scholey on 20 March stating:

"You suggested earlier that the European Commission would object to that prospect"—
the sale of the hot strip mill—
"but I now understand that this is unlikely."

He then went on to ask the chairman of British Steel to reconsider his position in relation to the strip mill.

With regard to the plate strategy, I accept the deep sense of disappointment in Lanarkshire and Scunthorpe at British Steel's announcement on 1 July that the company was to invest in new plate facilities at Teesside. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes was right to say, first, that the rest of that plant did not depend on the plate mill, so there was no reason why the rest of the plant should be affected significantly by the closure of the plate mill; secondly, and more importantly, on the need to be positive. The creation of new jobs requires the development of new products, processes and markets. During the past decade, Scunthorpe has shown just how successfully diversification can be put into practice.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: No, I do not have time.

I shall turn briefly to the Lanarkshire working group and the remedial measures that have been announced. I believe that those measures have received a good response in Lanarkshire, and that there is a spirit of co-operation and a willingness to try to ensure that they succeed.

I shall outline some of the figures that make up the £120 million which has been mentioned. Some £36 million was the initial allocation of Scottish Enterprise to the Lanarkshire development agency—as recently announced. I thought that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made a positive suggestion in relation to the future role of the expertise that has been built up in East Kilbride development corporation, which we are examining. East Kilbride has £26 million. We can add the £28 million from the Department of Trade and Industry, through the iron and steel employees re-adaptation benefit scheme.

Some £5 million extra was given by the Scottish Development Agency for sites purchased in 1991—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries. There is also the £15 million announced by the Prime Minister, and the £5 million allocated to Scottish Enterprise for Lanarkshire in 1991-92. Again, picking up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries, there was £4 million for the Lanarkshire development agency for extra training and associated expenses, and the £4 million in extra capital consents to local authorities for factory building.

This is what has been announced so far, and it constitutes a substantial commitment to Lanarkshire. The Secretary of State has made it absolutely clear that Lanarkshire will continue to have a high priority in future public expenditure decisions. We have commissioned a study on the upgrading of the A8 and have undertaken to consider the case for an enterprise zone. We have given a commitment to a new hospital. I believe that there will be a positive response from Lanarkshire to those positive proposals.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Not enough.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman suggests that that is not enough, but it is a substantial commitment. I noticed that the Opposition did not promise any extra money under a Labour Government.

7.33 pm

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: This debate on the whole of the United Kingdom steel industry was triggered by the Select Committee's report. It is clearly a debate that will not conclude tonight, because the events with which it is concerned will not be concluded tonight. The evidence we took only little more than half a year ago about the projections for steel consumption in western Europe in particular have already been vitiated, and it looks as though the costs of reunifying eastern with west Germany will push interest rates still higher, or at least prevent them from falling as we would have wished. Therefore, the problems facing the management of every form of steel production and steel processing plant in western Europe will come under greater pressure. They will not be relieved of difficult decisions by an unexpected improvement in the demand for steel and steel products throughout western Europe.

The present afflictions that are hitting the rest of the world and the political uncertainties now in many of the export markets—Yugoslavia is merely one case in point—are likely to lead to further postponements of investment in the steel industry in particular, because the demand for some of its products is likely to be postponed.

I imagine that the House will want to return to the extremely important subject of what continues to be one of the United Kingdom's most important industries.

The debate was concluded, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).

Waiting Lists

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the Health Committee of Session 1990-91 on Public Expenditure on Health Services: Waiting Lists (House of Commons Paper No. 429-1): the Government Reply to the First Report (Cm. 1586) and the Minutes of Evidence of the Welsh Affairs, Committee of Session 1990-91 (House of Commons Papers Nos. 390—i to iii).]

CLASS XIII, VOTE 1

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further sum, not exceeding £9,962,627,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £162,196,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payments during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Health on hospital, community health, family health and family health service administration services, and on related services.—*[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the next estimate on the Order Paper under class XVI, vote 8:

That a further sum, not exceeding £697,400,000 and including a Supplementary Sum of £10,291,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Welsh Office on hospital, community health, family health (part) and family health service administration services and on related services.

7.36 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am pleased to initiate a debate this evening under class XIII, vote 1 and class XVI, vote 8 on waiting lists in the national health service and to enable the House to debate a report of the Select Committee on Health on waiting lists and waiting times.

Waiting lists for treatment have been a feature of the national health service since its inception in 1948. In a cash-limited system such as the NHS in the United Kingdom, waiting lists represent the main rationalising mechanism for reconciling supply and demand. While actual list sizes are of legitimate concern, not only to the House but to people outside, the more important issue is the time that people have to wait for their treatment. In theory, waiting lists are for only elective, non-emergency cases which are ordered in relation to a doctor's assessment of clinical priority. The lower the priority of an individual's condition, the longer that individual is likely to wait for treatment.

The most recent validated figures from the Department of Health show that at the end of September 1990 almost 750,000 people were waiting for in-patient admissions. In addition, slightly more than 210,000 people were waiting for day case admissions. In my view and that of the Select Committee on Health, strong measures are required to reduce those lists and, more importantly, to reduce the time that people have to wait for treatment.

The figures also show that, of all those waiting for treatment in September 1990, more than 200,000 people had been waiting for more than one year and more than 70,000 had been waiting for two years or more. Those are stark but important statistics.

In its first report since being formally instituted in January this year, the Select Committee on Health described the potential consequences of long waiting times as follows:

"People may lose their jobs as they may have to wait longer than their sick pay conditions entitle them to; others may have to give up their jobs to look after a relative who is waiting for an admission; some people may experience a further deterioration of complication in their conditions. This may add to eventual financial cost to the NHS as they may then require even greater levels of medical intervention."

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health properly understands that. The report continues:

"People waiting for admissions represent a continuing cost to the health and social services: community nursing visits, prescription charges, sick pay, GPs' time, social support in people's homes all continue as the person waits."

We concluded in paragraph 6:

"The human misery and financial cost of long waiting lists is impossible to quantify."

The Committee also found unacceptable variations in the size of lists and in the time that people had to wait for treatment, depending on which region, district, hospital, specialty or consultant a person was referred to. Those variations could not be explained by differences in need between different places. We therefore inquired into the steps that the Government are taking to reduce the size of NHS waiting lists and, more importantly, to reduce the time that people have to wait for treatment.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): When my hon. Friend's Committee considered the different factors that might have affected waiting lists in different areas, what investigation did it make into the quality of management in different health authorities?

Mr. Winterton: That is an important point and I hope to answer it in my speech. I am about to refer to it en passant in relation to my area. Perhaps good management has a part to play in reducing waiting lists. I refer first to the Mersey regional health authority. I do not always see eye to eye with its chairman, Sir Donald Wilson, but I must give him full credit for the excellent work that he and his staff in Mersey have done to achieve the lowest waiting lists in the country. He deserves congratulations on that.

I know rather more, however, about Macclesfield health authority than about Mersey. Macclesfield's waiting list record is one of the best in the Mersey region. I pay tribute to the district general manager, Mr. Bill Dobson, and to the chairman of the health authority, Mr. Peter Hayes, who has done an amazing job. I quote from the *Macclesfield Express Advertiser*:

"Health Minister, Mrs. Virginia Bottomley, recently gave Mersey region credit for having done more to reduce its waiting lists than any other region, having no-one waiting more than two years".

In Macclesfield we have gone one step further. According to Mr. Dobson,

"'We now have only two people on our waiting lists who have been waiting longer than 18 months and I expect that figure to go down again very soon.' But there is no room for complacency . . . We should continue to monitor waiting lists closely. Our next target is to have no one who has been on a waiting list for treatment in Macclesfield longer than 12 months."

To return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), good management did play an important part in Macclesfield in reducing waiting lists and waiting times, but I would not be allowed to get away with saying that without adding that, possibly in

most areas, additional resources could also make a large contribution to further reductions in waiting lists and times.

I should also pay tribute and express my thanks to our specialist adviser, Dr. Steve Engleman, for his help in this inquiry into waiting lists and times. I am also grateful to our specialist adviser Gregor Henderson who has done exceptionally good work for the Committee. The Committee is also grateful to Mr. John Yates of the university of Birmingham's Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy for his frank and thoughtful evidence to the Committee. I do not think that we have ever been given such competent, informed, and well-researched evidence.

The Government published their reply to our report on Tuesday 2 July, just two days ago. They said in their introduction:

"The Committee's report makes a number of helpful comments on how waiting lists and times might be reduced. Most of these are firm policy: others are being considered carefully."

That is encouraging to the Select Committee and we are especially pleased that the Government have accepted 13 of our 22 recommendations.

There are five areas in our report and the Government's reply to it to which I wish to draw the attention of the House. The first I call, "Leaving things to the district health authorities." The Government agree that the validation of waiting lists is a normal part of waiting list management, but in some circumstances extra resources may be required for information systems and clerical support to help some specialties to validate their lists effectively. These extra resources may not be easily identifiable from within a district budget. The Department should therefore give districts support to ensure that the people responsible for validating waiting lists do not start from a disadvantaged position.

We were pleased to see that the Department is encouraging the development of more day case work, but, as we pointed out in the report, a further shift of resources to more day case work will necessitate further strengthening of primary and community health care services. We look to the Department to ensure that its monitoring of health authorities is capable of assessing the implications of the shift to more day case work for primary and community care services.

Similarly, it is not enough to say that health authorities are responsible for the provision and organisation of services to meet the health needs of their resident populations when central help can be provided by the Department to help them in that task. For example, we believe that the Department should investigate the likely cost-effectiveness and impact on services, in both urban and rural areas, of providing out-patient clinics in different specialties in community and primary care settings. We call on the Government to fund assessments of cost-effectiveness in this area and then to disseminate the relevant experiences.

When we visited Huntingdon we found that consultant obstetricians from Hinchingbrooke hospital are conducting out-patient antenatal clinics in GPs' surgeries every week. Other districts can learn from such examples and then apply what is relevant to their local needs.

Districts also need help in dealing with problems caused by the few consultants who, regrettably, do not pull their weight in their national health service work. Everyone is aware of the local effects of that and of the money wasted if a consultant is suspended while a long inquiry takes place. We recommend that the Department carry out a study to try to determine the influence that private practice in the same unit or specialty has on the time people have to wait for NHS treatment. Unfortunately, the Government rejected that recommendation as they were unsure of what it would achieve. They told us that it is up to the district health authority to ensure that consultants match their service contracts to their job plans. That, however, is a difficult task, since districts hold only consultants' job plans, not their service contracts—they are held by the region. Of course, trust hospitals employ their consultants directly. May I suggest to Ministers that consultants' service contracts in directly managed units be held by the hospitals concerned, not by the regions?

The Select Committee of which we used to be part, the Social Services Select Committee, made that recommendation in more than one of its reports. I reiterate our recommendation that a study be carried out on the influence, if any, of private practice on waiting times. We believe that most doctors would welcome such a study.

I should like to make one further point connected with the Government's reply to our conclusions on the effect of private medical practice. It concerns the Government's choice of words, and I quote from their response:

"Management is also responsible for ensuring that private practice does not, to a significant extent, interfere with the performance of the functions of the health service or disadvantage non-paying patients."

Surely that should read "to any extent". I should welcome an assurance on that.

The second area requiring immediate and careful attention is money. The Government rejected our calls for more resources to reduce waiting lists and times. The central allocation of money to this year's waiting list initiative was increased in cash terms in 1991-92 by £2 million—from £33 million to £35 million. Some £25·5 million of that will be paid to regions only if they achieve the targets that they have agreed with the NHS management executive. Regions have also to match the central contribution of £25·5 million pound for pound from their own resources. That effectively removes £25·5 million that could be spent by the regions on other services.

Targets have to be met before any money is paid up front, and there is a chance that central expenditure for 1991-92 on the waiting list initiative will not be as high as last year. An assurance about that would be helpful. Paying money only when targets are met reduces the perverse incentive for specialties to increase their lists to attract more money. It does not make adequate provision for paying money up front to help specialities reduce their lists in the first place.

Our report recommends that some waiting list money should be kept aside to reward good practice. We made that recommendation after hearing the views of Mr. John Yates, whose work in reducing the worst waiting lists has rightly been commended by the Government and the Committee. Mr. Yates thinks that hospitals or specialties should be given an incentive—a good practice bonus for specialties or authorities that keep their lists down. We call that a preventive incentive scheme aimed at preventing waiting lists and waiting times from rising in the first place by rewarding those who manage their specialties effectively.

[Mr. Winterton]

Sadly, the Government's reply to our report failed to respond to that recommendation and I invite the Minister to respond in her winding-up speech. However, the Government's reply states that they are considering future initiatives for tackling waiting lists and times and their funding. We would welcome clarification about when we will know what those initiatives are and whether they will involve more resources which, as I said earlier, are necessary to deal with the problem. An announcement today about more resources to reduce waiting lists and times would be welcome news not only for the thousands of people on the waiting lists, but for doctors who are constantly required to arbitrate between patients with similar clinical needs, one of whom may be seen the following week while the other cannot be seen for six months or more.

The third main area is that of extra-contractual referrals. I am confident that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) will have more to say on that matter if she speaks in the debate. The Committee heard evidence that where there are block contracts between health authorities and provider units and when the health authority has set aside a small reserve for extra-contractual referrals, GPs have a restricted choice about where to send patients.

A new sort of waiting list may be appearing consisting of patients who could be treated immediately outside their districts but who are having to wait for treatment, not because the hospital concerned cannot treat them immediately, but because their district health authority has not kept sufficient money in its back pocket to pay for that treatment in the current financial year. I hope that the NHS reforms will not simply replace one sort of waiting list with another.

The fourth area of concern to the Select Committee is the monitoring of NHS reforms and the information that will be made available. The Government responded to the Committee's concern that close and careful monitoring of the reforms should take place by citing the work of the six NHS sites which are working with the management executive on assessing the local impact of reforms. We all eagerly await some feedback on the lessons to be learnt from Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Halton in my neck of the woods in Cheshire, St. Helens, Knowsley and Warrington, which is close to my area, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Wandsworth and West Dorset. When will those sites make their first reports to the management executive?

The Committee was pleased to hear about the establishment of a joint NHS review committee with the general medical services committee. However, we are not sure of the purpose and authority of the committee that has been established. Will it monitor and evaluate the reforms, or will it be a forum only for raising and discussing issues that arise from the reforms? If it is to be the former, evaluation implies that a judgment will be made at the end of the exercise on whether the venture has been successful and is worth continuing in its present form. The Select Committee would welcome such an approach.

If that is to be the joint committee's purpose, what resources will be made available to it to enable it to carry out the required monitoring, research and evaluation? Further clarification of the Government's intentions in agreeing to the setting up of the new joint review committee is needed to give a clear sign that the Government intend to develop a more meaningful relationship with the profession than has been possible in the past.

We were also concerned that information on waiting lists and waiting times should not be restricted to collecting only purchaser-based figures. The Committee viewed that as important and took the view that information on waiting lists and times should continue to be collected and disseminated for each provider unit. If that is not done, how will GPs and, much more importantly, their patients, the clients, be able to compare the waiting times of different hospitals and exercise choice about where to go for treatment? If the Government proceed on the lines that they imply in their reply to our report, the philosophy behind the reforms will be negated by Government action.

The Government say that people should have more choice. However, they must have the proper information on which to base that choice. That is why we need not only purchaser-based figures but provider-based figures. I hope that on mature consideration the Minister and her Department will assure the House that that is the future intention. We hear a great deal and speak a great deal about the Prime Minister's citizens charter and what I have asked the Minister to do is entirely in accordance with the concept of that charter. I hope that in her winding-up speech the Minister will give the Committee and the House the assurances that I seek.

Finally, our report on waiting lists raises the need for a wide and open public debate about what the NHS can and should do. We are worried that the reformed NHS may lead to unplanned changes or inequalities in access to health services. We need to ensure that the NHS continues to deliver a national health service that meets the needs of all our people in a co-ordinated and planned way. We were concerned that the reforms might not succeed in reducing waiting lists and times for treatment to a manageable and reasonable level because of an inability to face the key question of how to meet the demand for services from limited health resources. We were also concerned that the new arrangement of purchasers and providers could lead to the stage at which people were waiting not only for treatment but for money.

The logical outcome of the NHS reforms is that the responsibility for waiting lists will shift from hospitals to general practitioner fund holders and district health authorities. I hope that that does not mean that the period that a patient waits for treatment will be determined solely by the amount of money left in the authority's or general practitioner's kitty. I look to the Government to continue to target their waiting list initiative in such a way that, wherever possible, patients in need of treatment can be promptly admitted to a hospital as a day case or on an in-patient basis as required.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will consider that the Committee's report is sound and well-researched and that the views that I have expressed on behalf of the Committee are constructive and merit the Government's serious consideration. I hope that I shall receive some reassurances when my hon. Friend contributes to the debate.

8 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): When talking about waiting lists, we need to bear in mind exactly what we mean by the term. Waiting list figures are serious enough but there is what might be called a hidden waiting list. As a patient is considered to be on a hospital waiting list after the first visit to a consultant, we ignore the many months that the patient may have waited between the general practitioner's referral and the visit to the consultant. I endorse everything that was said so well and clearly by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), but I sound the warning that waiting-list figures, serious though they are, underestimate the extent of the problem.

General practitioners are aware that there are long waiting lists in certain specialties or in certain areas, and that it may be necessary for a patient to wait a long time to see a consultant for the first time. That can act as a profound disincentive to a GP to make a referral. Once he tells the patient that he wants to send him to a hospital, he knows that that patient will be on tenterhooks while waiting for the visit and wondering what the outcome will be. Accordingly, the GP may be strongly inclined to delay referral, if that is at all possible. That can happen if someone is suffering from cataracts, for example. The temptation not to refer is a strong one.

We should not forget that there are two layers, as it were, before we reach the waiting list proper. I have noticed also that there is a tendency to use the term "elective surgery" as if that means that someone can take it or leave it and that the surgery is an optional extra in someone's life. I fully accept that those who go on waiting lists are not suffering from conditions that require emergency treatment. If someone is knocked over or he or she falls in the street, or is involved in some other accident that requires emergency treatment, he or she will be taken to hospital immediately and treated. We are all extremely proud of the national health service's record in providing that sort of treatment, and grateful for it. However, someone can suffer from a condition that is extremely important to him or her even though it cannot be described as one that requires emergency treatment. The use of the term "elective surgery", the tone in which it is uttered and the context in which it is used, often underestimates the vital part that the appropriate treatment can play in people's lives.

Cataract operations are described as elective surgery, as are hip replacements. People who need the operations to be carried out can languish in waiting lists for a considerable time, during which they can involve various public services in considerable expense. Those who find themselves in that position suffer considerable misery, distress and anxiety. Elective does not mean unimportant.

Waiting lists have been long in the north-west but I am glad to say that there are improvements. However, one or two matters still concern me. I have been reading a document that was published by the regional health authority in March 1991. It contains a column that sets out reductions in waiting lists, which is headed "Waiting Lists Reduced". The document states that the region's total waiting list stands at 87,579. The list has been reduced, but it is still considerable. The document states:

> "It is an encouraging sign that the majority of these patients have been on the list for less than a year, with 12 per cent. waiting over a year"—

that is more than 10,500—

> "and only 6 per cent for more than two years."

The word to which I wish to draw attention is "only". When "only" precedes 6 per cent., it means that 5,255 people have been waiting for more than two years. A reference to "only 6 per cent." may give the impression that only a few people are involved, but 5,255 sounds a lot more. If they have been waiting for more than two years, for how long have they been waiting?

A young woman in my constituency—I shall not name her for obvious reasons—has been waiting for surgery since 1984. The term "over two years" can hide a waiting time that is considerably longer than two years. It is significant, however, that the specialty involved is plastic surgery. There are many who choose to think of plastic surgery as an optional extra and as something that is not especially important, and in doing so they often make a grave mistake. The young woman who has been waiting since 1984 wrote to me in the autumn of 1990—she is still waiting—and explained the position. She wrote:

> "I was assaulted in 1983. My nose was broken. I have recently had an operation on my nose to help me breathe easier as I could not sleep properly at night."

She waited several years for an operation to help her to breathe properly after a criminal assault. Her letter continues:

> "But I still need plastic surgery on it for my appearance. I am 28 years old now. I do not have a social life as I have lost my confidence due to my nose."

When she saw the plastic surgeon shortly before writing that letter, she was told that she might still have to wait a further three or four years. I think that she is reasonable when she writes:

> "I think this is ridiculous as I was the innocent party in this assault."

If someone suffers a criminal assault we are all extremely sorry and we wish to see the assailant brought to justice. Surely we have some further responsibility to the victim. It is ridiculous and disgraceful that my constituent has had to wait so many years because she requires plastic surgery. I have now been informed—naturally I am in contact with the health authority about the matter—that it is hoped that she will be seen in the next financial year. That is progress. It is better than three or four years. But I am still deeply distressed on behalf of that young woman.

In the Preston health authority 1,010 people have been waiting for plastic surgery for more than two years. I have given one example. In case people are tempted to think that these are cases where, for example, a person goes along for plastic surgery having been foolish enough to have a tattoo saying "Judy" and is now going out with a young lady called Carol, I remind the House that before those 1,010 people got on the waiting list they had to satisfy their general practitioner that the treatment was necessary and proper for the NHS and they had to satisfy the consultant likewise.

It is reasonable for us to assume that those 1,010 people who have waited more than two years are genuinely waiting for clinically necessary treatment. I deplore any suggestions—they are sometimes made—that because a specialty is plastic surgery it somehow does not matter that there are these outrageous waiting lists.

Extra-contractual referrals have been mentioned and I certainly intend to say a word about them. That issue was raised with the Secretary of State when he was being cross-examined on the Department's spending plans in general. On that occasion I quoted from advice, perhaps better described as instructions, to general practitioners in the Preston health authority area that extra-contractual

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

referrals could be authorised only after reference to the health authority, and general practitioners were advised that previous consultation about the case was desirable in order to avoid the "embarrassment" of having "to defer or even reject" the extra-contractual referral.

In response to my complaint about that, the Secretary of State said that the clinical judgment of where, when and if to refer a patient remained with the general practitioner. However, he somewhat undermined that welcome statement with the qualification that the health authority might have to defer the referral. Clinical judgment which can be exercised but which can then be deferred by the health authority is the exercise of clinical judgment in theory only and that is no use to any patient. If a patient is referred by a general practitioner outside the health authority's contractual area, that patient wants to have the consultation and the treatment if appropriate. It is no earthly use to that patient if the referral can be deferred, and it may mean deferred indefinitely, by the health authority.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): My hon. Friend makes a good point. Just today I received a letter from my district health authority's general manager giving me the reason for refusing 18 extra-contractual referrals and one of them was the refusal of a general practitioner referral direct to Leeds for in vitro fertilisation treatment because Calderdale has a contract with Hull. It said that charges can be accepted only if referred through a Calderdale consultant.

Mrs. Wise: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because that is another example from an entirely different area of the restriction of the general practitioner's exercise of his clinical judgment; a refusal to allow a GP to exercise clinical judgment. It is valueless for the Secretary of State to tell general practitioners that these judgments can be made by them if in practice no such thing can happen.

In reply, the Secretary of State said that we are used to waiting lists and that this is simply a waiting list. I find it deeply disturbing that we are contemplating the creation of yet another layer of waiting lists. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Health will look carefully at this and will not be content with empty words.

We should take care in relation to one of even the Select Committee's recommendations. The Select Committee's recommendations are, as always, excellent, but it has been drawn to my attention, and perhaps to that of other members of the Committee, that recommendation 7 concerning the South Western regional health authority's efforts to replace waiting lists by new arrangements giving all patients booked appointments may have many pitfalls.

Therefore, when recommendation 7 says:

"We recommend that the NHS Management Executive study closely the progress of"

such efforts, I hope that in doing so they will also study the exact working of such efforts to ensure that they are not just another method of causing problems for general practitioners and their patients.

Recommendation 12 refers to day case work which the Select Committee and the Department think is highly desirable. However, the Select Committee makes the vital point that:

"This will necessitate further strengthening of primary health care services and substantial improvements in community health systems and services to enable people to be discharged from hospital earlier and supported in their own home environment."

One of the things that I am sorriest about is that I see no evidence of any such improvements. We cannot come to a satisfactory solution of waiting list problems or health service problems without carrying out the recommendation contained in that sentence.

8.18 pm

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I admire, like and respect the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise)—I hope that that does not do her political career too much damage—but it is not right for her to say, as she did a moment ago, that there have not been improvements. There have been significant improvements in waiting lists. I will explain to the hon. Lady in a moment where they have been. They have been widespread.

Mrs. Wise: I did not say that there have been no improvements; there have been improvements. I acknowledged that there have been improvements.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful. I completely misunderstood what the hon. Lady said. I am delighted that she accepts that there have been improvements. It is very easy for Conservative Members to tell people that we are spending more on health than any other Government, which is true; that for the first time we are spending more on health than on defence, which is true; that we are spending about £33 billion per year on health compared with £7·5 billion in 1979, which is true. It is true also that waiting lists increased by 40 per cent. under the last Labour Government and have fallen by 6 per cent. under the present Government. However, that does not cut a lot of ice with our constituents, for whom the measure of the health service is not the amount of money that is spent on it—important though that is—but the treatment that people receive and the relief from pain and suffering that the service provides.

In the eyes of the electorate, the measure of the health service is its success in getting people off the waiting list who should not be on it. All right hon. and hon. Members can tell appalling stories about waiting lists. I await with interest the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), who is Labour's health spokesman. How is it that, under every Labour Government, waiting lists increased, whereas they have decreased under every Conservative Government?

The recent April-on-April figures look much better than some of us ever imagined. The number of persons waiting for elective surgery for more than a year has fallen by 19 per cent.; and for longer than two years by more than 39 per cent. That is incredibly good news. People may say that that is not the case in their areas. I hope that it will not be too tedious if I give the figures region by region, because the public should know them.

Those who have been waiting for more than two years for elective surgery in the Northern region has fallen by 47·9 per cent.; in Yorkshire, 18·1 per cent.; Trent, 87·4 per cent.; East Anglian, 24·5 per cent.; North West Thames, 22·3 per cent.; North East Thames, 58·3 per cent.; South East Thames, 30·5 per cent.; South West Thames, 50·1 per cent.; Wessex, 30·2 per cent.; Oxford, 31 per cent.; South Western, 19·8 per cent.; West Midlands, 32 per cent.; North Western, 45·9 per cent.; and Mersey, 100 per cent. Thank goodness one public service in Merseyside is

working—and it is not surprising that the people who run it were appointed by a Conservative Government. However, the polling stations in Walton are just about to close, and no one voting in by-elections pays the slightest attention to what is said in this place anyway.

People should know that there is good news. We always hear good news from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who spoke of the great strides forward in his area—which is doubtless partly due to his splendid advocacy. In 1979, the number of people on the waiting list in his constituency was more than 1,000, but the figure today is fewer than 120. That may be rough on the 118 individuals concerned, but it is still a tremendous achievement. Why not give credit where it is due?

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I refer the hon. Gentleman to page 31 of the Select Committee's report, which shows waiting list statistics for in-patient admissions in England in respect of those waiting more than one year. If one compares September 1986 with September 1990, one sees that the figure for the Northern region, for example, increased from 6,426 to 7,264; for East Anglian, from 6,793 to 8,650; and for North West Thames from 10,837 to 12,632. I will not continue, because I might then have to truncate my speech.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman may not be called, if he goes on. I was making the point that many more people are being treated under the present Government than ever before. It is good to see a Select Committee report so universally welcomed by the Government. It prompted so many responses of "agree" and "entirely agree" that I could not believe my ears. If there is good management, and if funds are used properly, waiting lists can be significantly reduced.

I was delighted to see from the Government's response that clerical validation, which is an aspect to which more thought ought to be given, has increased by 52 per cent. We can do better than that. In his evidence to the Committee, Duncan Nichol said:

> "I was talking this morning with general practitioners in Oxford; they had secured their waiting lists from the hospitals, got their patients who were currently waiting back in front of them and they had gone through this list and removed 34 per cent. of the patients that they knew did not require to be on that waiting list."

That is a remarkable reduction. Validation should be not just 52 per cent. but 100 per cent. Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy wrote:

> "Some of the failures to validate lists properly almost defy belief. When the largest single surgical list in the country was validated in 1989, 4,000 were written to from that one specialty alone. One half of the patients did not reply at all and a further 450 patients asked to be removed from the waiting list. By the time the validation was completed only 35 per cent. of those written to remained on the list. In another specialty all general surgical patients were written to in two successive years and on both occasions all the patients who failed to reply were left on the waiting list."

An enormous amount of work remains to be done on that aspect. It may be boring, painstaking and clerical work, but it must be done.

The fact remains that national health patients are operated upon far more quickly than in the past. I am delighted that the Government are spending more money, and I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members share my view.

In today's issue of *The Independent*, its political correspondent, Nicholas Timmins, who is an expert on health matters, writes that the Government are to cease publication of hospital waiting lists. No doubt the hon. Member for Peckham will say that that is because the waiting lists are so rotten and miserable. The truth is that far more information about waiting lists is to be given by the Government than ever before. Mr. Timmins knows a great deal about health matters, and I do not mean to be difficult, but I refer him to the final paragraph of the Government's response:

> "We shall continue to publish waiting list and time figures, as we have done since 1984. In the short term, figures will be published on both a provider basis, as now, and on a purchaser basis. In future, we will publish purchaser-based figures, as these will reveal health authorities' performance in purchasing early treatment for their local populations."

The hon. Member for Peckham is always announcing new policies, but she may be afraid that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary will cost them. On the other hand, we hear from Labour that it will not spend more money on the health service. Nevertheless, we want to hear what the hon. Lady has to say about how Labour will reduce waiting lists, and improve hospital efficiency and management.

In health care today, money travels with the patient. For the first time, hospitals will have an incentive to produce effective, quality contracts, and to perform operations as quickly as they can. There will be a financial incentive for not just health service trust hospitals—which will be opting out of nothing except bureaucracy—but all others to publish the maximum information, so that the public can make the right choice. We know that the Opposition do not believe in choice, unless it is choice for a little more money for NUPE and COHSE and £175 million for the minimum wage for the NHS. All that will not help patient care *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) suggests that I should get on with it. He is right. He talks a lot of common sense some of the time. I should not be too unkind to the hon. Member for Peckham. She will have the opportunity to put her case. It is nonsense to say that there will be insufficient information—quite the opposite.

While I am on the question of national health service trust hospitals, I hope that the hon. Member for Peckham will have the grace to say that all the talk about profits before patients and all the talk just about profits is not true. She was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the National Health Service and Community Care Bill which is now an Act. She knows that it is unlawful for any NHS trust hospital to make a profit. I hope that, once and for all, she will have the grace to put the record straight.

As for the publication of information, the Audit Commission has done a fantastic job. All the members of the Select Committee were very impressed by the evidence it gave us. Within one year, it has produced a health and financial profile for every single district. I should like the Government to consider carefully the fact that these profiles are not in the public domain. They should be. The Audit Commission put forward all sorts of ways in which the national health service could use its resources far more efficiently. Many of the Select Committee members would like the Audit Commission to extend the scope of its investigation into the national health service.

Our report referred to the importance of day surgery. The Select Committee has just returned from Sweden. The

[Mr. Hayes]

hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye has one of those looks that suggests something that did not happen. It was a perfectly respectable and sensible visit to Sweden.

We visited one of the finest hospitals that Sweden, and Stockholm, has to offer. The members of the Select Committee found in that plush hospital that the walls were almost lined with money. It should not be forgotten that we were in a socialist mecca. Lots of patients were being treated; there were hardly any waiting lists; there was an air of hushed excitement and expectancy among administrators and doctors; they were treating more and more people.

We said "What's the secret of your success?" "Actually," we were told, "we have removed one tier of management—the politicians; we have got rid of them. We have brought in industrialists to help to run our hospitals." "Oh," said some of the members of the Committee, "how very interesting." "Also," said the administrator, who is also a professor, "we are going to be in competition with other hospitals. You know what?" he said: "it's very exciting; we're going to have to work to a budget." We realised, in this mecca of socialism, that the finest hospital in Stockholm and in Sweden was effectively a national health service trust hospital. It was only nine months behind the reforms that this Government have introduced.

One of the members of the Select Committee said, "This is a spotlessly clean hospital; you must employ lots of people to keep it clean." "No," said the administrator, "We put all that out to private tender some time ago." If that is good enough for socialist Sweden, it is good enough for us. Despite all the problems, the Government have nothing to be ashamed about in waiting lists. We need a little bit more money to reduce them, but the figures that have been published are very good news.

It is also good news that, at last, the British Medical Association is beginning to appreciate that many doctors are queuing up to become fund holders. That is why there has been a change of mood. NHS administrators are beginning to realise that these reforms are very good. At trust hospitals such as Guy's, doctors and nurses are treating more and more patients than ever before. That is what the reforms are all about. I hope that we shall hear about what the Labour party intends to do.

8.35 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I intend to concentrate on the excellent report that the Select Committee has produced and on the Government's response to it. This is an important debate. The Committee produced an important and weighty report. I welcome the chance to debate it. I welcome also what was said by way of introduction by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), the Committee's Chairman, who was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise). The fact that they chose the waiting list issue for their first report shows a sharp sense of priorities. Waiting times are the major source of complaint.

Most people are happy with the care that is provided by the NHS. They have great affection for it and they support it. However, people are very worried about waiting times. The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) thinks that it is just a clerical or a statistical issue. He produced loads of statistical and clerical figures in an effort to suggest that this is all a figment of our imagination. Whatever the figures may suggest, if one goes into the orthopaedic ward of any hospital and talks to the people there, following surgery, they say, "Thank goodness I've had my operation. Yes, I'm getting on really well and beginning to look forward to the future, but it has been the most terrible thing to have to wait for my operation." Then out pour stories of family relationships broken, of the husband having to move into another bedroom because his wife has been unable to sleep for month after month and therefore argues with the children, of someone who has lost his job because he has been off work sick for so long waiting for his operation that he feels, when the firm hits hard times, that he cannot stand in the way of others who might be made redundant if he does not stand down from the firm.

Mrs. Mahon: The one statistic that the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) did not give was the number of people who had been in so much pain that they decided to pay for a hip operation. It would have been interesting if he had referred to every district and said how many people had been forced by pain to pay thousands of pounds for a hip operation.

Ms. Harman: My hon. Friend has made a very important point that I was about to make. We are talking not just about statistics but about people who are waiting in pain for their operations, about people who lose their jobs because they cannot get around and also about people who become immobile, even when they have had their operations, because they had to wait for it for so long. They never made the complete recovery that they would have made if they had had their operations when they needed them. I support the point made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield in the Committee's report, that "the human misery and financial cost of long waiting lists are impossible to quantify."
That is the starting point to which we must continue to return.

In addition to the pain, misery and financial cost of long waiting times for individual patients, there is also anger that, having paid their national insurance and taxes, the national health service was not there when they needed it. There is also bitterness because people know that, if they could go private, they could be treated the following week and would not have to wait. It is not fair that only those who can pay again, having already paid through their national insurance and taxes, should get the treatment when they need it.

As the hon. Member for Macclesfield said, it is inefficient to treat people long after they need their operations. We should think of the work and the time that is lost to industry, and of the fact that an operation often needs to be larger if it is delayed—for example, hip operations. We should also think of the people who, after waiting immobile for a year and a half, never really get the courage to re-enter life in the outside word, even after they have had their operation and have regained their physical mobility. That recognition of the cost of long waiting lists is one of the reasons why so many employers offer health insurance to their employees. It is not as a perk to their staff, but because they cannot afford to have their employees off sick for a long time while they wait for operations.

About 93 per cent. of the people on waiting lists are classed as non-urgent cases, but we should not be complacent. I reinforce what was said by my hon. Friend

the Member for Preston about calling it "elective surgery". We are referring to people waiting with failing eyesight for cataract operations or those who are waiting for hip replacements. The idea of non-urgency is a strictly medical definition about whether someone is likely to die, rather than whether he needs the surgery. Doctors are not gung-ho about surgery. People are not put on to a list unless they need an operation. An operation is always a significant step for the individual, quite apart from the background of a lack of resources or beds. People are not put on lists without a second thought.

The numbers waiting more than two years have dropped, but worryingly the numbers waiting for more than a year have increased from 161,326, to 172,025. The problem of waiting is endemic. It is not a question just of local efficiency—of some areas not getting their act together—or of a lack of information—that if only people knew where to go to get the operation matters would improve. As the figures in the report show, 23 per cent. of people are waiting for more than a year. The problem does not affect only in-patients; day and out-patients are also waiting for treatment.

Part of the Government's response is to imply that there is a lack of information, and that if there was more information about where people could get treatment quickly they would travel there and there would be less of a problem. The College of Health initiative—the national waiting list help line—shows, not surprisingly, that most of the calls are from people who need operations for which there are long waits in all areas. From the figures, we can see that about half the calls were from orthopaedic patients, most of whom were waiting for hip or knee replacements. Incidentally, a great many people were not able to get through when the lines were first opened because the lines were jammed. The next largest group were waiting for general surgery, such as hernia operations. After that came those wanting cataract operations and then those waiting for ear, nose and throat services, such as grommets for children with hearing problems.

Faced with so many people calling about general surgery or orthopaedic services, it is worth examining the waiting lists for those services to see whether the problem can be dealt with by simply shifting patients from one area with long waiting lists to another area where there are not. The statistical section of the Library has kindly gone through the figures for me. If we examine the waiting lists for general surgery, trauma and orthopaedics, district by district, we see that all the districts have waiting lists. Large numbers of people are waiting for the same operation in every part of the country.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon) *rose*——

Ms. Harman: Perhaps the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) would like to know the figures for Basildon district health authority. It has a waiting list for general surgery, and for trauma and orthopaedics. If his constituents want to travel to find a place where they might find no waiting lists for those services, perhaps we can hear from him, an advocate of the free market, where they can go to escape those waiting lists.

Mr. Amess: I thank the hon. Lady for that generous billing. I hope that when I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall be able to talk about Basildon. I have been following the hon. Lady's speech carefully. I know that she is anxious to make progress, and to tell the House how Labour party policy will address the gloomy situation that she is describing. How much extra money has the Labour party pledged to spend on the national health service, especially on hospital waiting lists? Could she give us that information a jump ahead in her speech?

Ms. Harman: I said from the outset that I would address myself to the report of the Select Committee and to the Government's response. I should be grateful if I could be allowed to carry on with my comments in that vein.

The Government's response is to imply that the problem is simply one of people not knowing where there are no waiting lists and that if people had the information and could ring the helpline, they could go where there were no waiting lists. I hope that the Minister will admit that for the things that the people are ringing up the helpline for there are waiting lists in all areas. The idea for them simply to travel is not possible. It will be a shame if the Government get into the business of raising people's hopes by saying that all that they need to do is to make a telephone call or a train journey, and the problem will be solved. It is deeper than that—the problem is endemic.

As has been pointed out, the problem will be that there will be less information as a result of the Government's intention to change the way in which waiting list information is collected. There will be less information about where the waiting lists are shorter. John Yates, commenting on the revelation that the Government are to change the way in which waiting lists information is collected, said in *The Independent* today:

> "These changes undermine the Government's own reforms. If health authorities and fund-holders want to shop around for the shortest wait, they need to know how long the wait is at hospitals with which they don't have contracts."

The Government have acknowledged that there is a problem with waiting lists. We need to have information on which to assess the position. The Government have admitted that there is a problem, yet they are ending the means by which we can measure progress. Not only are they ending the means by which they say that people can travel to where waiting lists are shorter, but they are ending our opportunity to compare year by year whether improvements are being made, or whether the position is getting worse.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) said that hospitals will publish their waiting lists. I hope that we shall have a more sophisticated response from the Minister because she will know that hospitals selectively publishing what they want to do as part of their sales patter is not the same as national Government responsibility for collecting information from all hospitals—those that want to reveal the information as well as those that do not. We cannot simply use information from an ad hoc marketing strategy as a substitute for nationally collected data, which we need to compare year on year. It is a cynical attempt to break the opportunity to compare because the Government think that things will get worse.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Harman: No, because I hope that I shall come to the problem that the hon. Gentleman seeks to address later in my speech.

[Ms. Harman]

Does the Minister really think that the problem is that people do not know where the treatment is and that, if they did, they could simply travel to it?

The other assumption lurking behind the Government's relaxed, laid-back complacency is that we are talking merely about inefficiency at local level and that, if we beef up the management, everything will be all right. They say, "Everyone should model themselves on the best, and the best have managed to crack the problem. If the problem has not been sorted out, there is clearly a problem with management at local level"—or "the bureaucrats", as I understand the Secretary of State now calls them.

A group of south London Members went to see the Under-Secretary about King's College hospital, which had 120 of its beds cut in the last financial year. People are having to wait longer for operations and people are even having to wait in the accident and emergency department because there are simply not enough beds available for them to be admitted to hospital even as emergencies. The Minister said, "King's cannot have the money to reopen its beds. The length of stay is too long." He took no account of the number of people in that hospital who cannot be discharged because the support services simply are not there.

The point that the Select Committee made in its report is critical not just because of the moves to day care and the placing of greater emphasis on out-patient treatment but because we need an effective and appropriate use of in-patient beds. We all know that some people are ditched out of hospital and suffer because the necessary support services are lacking. Others remain in hospital because they simply cannot be discharged. The hospital social workers at King's told me of a patient on an orthopaedic ward who was desperate to go home. He was growing depressed because, although he had been officially discharged over a month before, he could not go home: the hospital simply could not arrange the necessary support services; there was simply not enough care and support available in the community.

In their response, the Government dealt with the matter in a narrow and shallow way. They said, "We expect health services and family health service authorities to take account of any increase in day case work when planning primary and community health services." That is not good enough, given that the support services are insufficient to allow people to be discharged when they need to be, let alone to cope with the welcome shift away from in-patient treatment to day-patient treatment. I hope that the Minister will show that she recognises the problem that already exists—quite apart from the growing problem. We are talking not just about the community nursing, psychiatric and chiropody services but about home helps, care assistants and all the other support services which should be there to enable the hospitals to do hospital work and people to be cared for in the community thereafter.

Even if travelling were the way to deal with the problem—if people could get an away-day ticket to the magical place where there is no waiting list—the Government should not be urging people in that direction. I thought that it was the Government's view—I thought there was a consensus—that treatment should be as locally based as possible so that, if there were post-operative complications, the patient would have an easy trip back to the person who had done the operation, to facilitate visiting and so that the patient could be discharged as early as possible because there was a close connection between the hospital and the community services. I do not accept the idea that people can get the information and then travel around but, even if I did, I would still be asking whether that is really the direction in which we should be going, especially as the operations for which there are long waiting lists—hip replacements and cataract removals—are mostly performed on elderly people who are the last people who should be shoved on a train and told to go somewhere else, even with the money following them.

The trouble is that the money will not be following the patient. When people rang the College of Health on the helpline to ask where the shortest waiting times were, they were asked, "Do you have a fund-holding GP, or are you one of the 90 per cent. who do not, because if you are, and if we suggest that you go to a hospital miles away from where you live, you may not be able to get financial approval from your district health authority for the referral."

The problem is not just that there are waiting lists in all parts of the country and not just that people should not be forced to travel. The Government's reforms and the internal market will make it more difficult for people to cross boundaries for their treatment.

Mr. Hayes: No.

Ms. Harman: The hon. Gentleman says no. The point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston, who explained that the money for extracontractual referral is already running out and that the contract referral pattern sets in concrete existing local referrals. There are not contracts all over the place, so people are looking for extracontractual referrals and the budgets are already running out.

The Government have failed to solve the problem of waiting lists. We should bear in mind the fact that they have been the Government for 12 years. I hope that, instead of making cheap, party-political points about the unions, as the hon. Member for Harlow did, the Minister will deal with her own Government's record and with the important points made by the Select Committee.

There are three fundamental reasons why the Government have failed to deal with the problem of waiting lists. The first element is lack of political will. Although I do not believe this of the Minister, there are many in her party who would be happy to see NHS waiting lists grow because they know that that is the biggest boost that they can give to the private sector, and that affects the political climate in which the hon. Lady has to work. The No Turning Back group has made it clear that it wants the national health service to be reduced to an accident and emergency service and that it does not think it appropriate for elective surgery to be undertaken by the health service. I do not accuse the Minister of holding that view. She is one of the more reasonable members of the Government. Nevertheless, it is part of the political background against which we must measure the Government's failure to deal with the problem of waiting lists.

The second element in that failure is a failure also to face the underfunding that lies at the root of the problem. As long as the Government talk about clerical audit of the

waiting lists, administrative changes and management, we know that they are ducking the issue and not providing enough resources.

Mr. Hayes: No.

Ms. Harman: John Yates himself recognised the importance of resourcing adequate services to meet demand. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has not read his Committee's report.

The third element in the Government's failure to solve the problem is that at national, regional and local level, the national health service has been diverted away from the task of dealing with waiting lists and towards other tasks —commercialisation of services, opting out, the internal market and GP budget-holding. What are they talking about at every health authority unit general managers' meeting? Are they talking about reducing the waiting list? No, they are talking about how on earth they will cope with the administrative changes forced on a reluctant British people by the Government.

If the Government cannot acknowledge the great diversion of energy, effort and resources that the NHS reforms have entailed, and if they cannot acknowledge that that has prevented the NHS from dealing with the problems with which everyone wants it to deal, they are failing—and will continue to fail—to address the issues that the Select Committee has so sensibly and seriously put before the House.

8.58 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) who finally reached the meat of the issue for some of us—although not all of us—when she referred to the reasons why she believed that the Government could not deal with the problem of waiting lists. If I remember correctly, her second point related to the underfunding of the health service. At that point I, like many other hon. Members, was waiting for the hon. Lady to announce the figure by which she considers the health service to be underfunded and for her commitment to restore that funding under a future Labour Government. I waited for that information with bated breath, but there was nothing and I was not surprised about that.

The idea that the national health service is somehow safer with Labour is one of the longest running deceits in British politics. With no experience of reducing waiting lists and with no pledge to increase resources for the NHS, how does the hon. Member for Peckham expect to tackle the problem of waiting lists? We heard no answers tonight.

Once again a serious debate on the NHS has resolved itself to its component parts. While we heard the rhetoric from Opposition Members about their commitment to the health service, the facts make their commitment just an idle boast. It must be rather depressing for them. Whether on the number of staff employed, on capital expenditure or patients treated—whatever the form of level playing field or horizontal operating table upon which the debate is to be conducted—the Opposition always come out second best. On this occasion, they have chosen the Select Committee's report on waiting lists to make their point.

I pay tribute to the Select Committee for the way in which it went about its task. We all care about waiting lists. My background in the health service is that I am the son of an NHS general practitioner. My brother works in the hospital service. I am a member of the NHS and of no other health care plan. I have a very close association with the hospitals in my area where I was born and brought up. I need no lectures on commitment to the health service from Opposition Members.

Hon. Members on all sides of the House share a commitment to reducing waiting lists. We recognise what the hon. Member for Peckham said, that behind each statistic there is a human story because no one would voluntarily wish to be on a waiting list. People are put on waiting lists because they are ill and something needs to be done. They would rather not be on one.

However, a waiting list does not tell the whole story. It is an indicator of the service provided through the NHS, but it is not the only indicator. For example, waiting lists do not tell us much about the remarkable stories of medical advance that now enable people to receive treatment that was undreamed of barely a decade ago. With regard to heart operations and hip replacements, new waiting lists are created as a result of medical expertise for which we should all be enormously grateful.

Waiting lists do not tell the full story about the efficiency of health authorities and how many people are actually treated. The hon. Member for Peckham did not mention the significant increase in the number of patients treated—both in-patients and day cases—under this Government. That is surely the bottom line for the health service—not beds, or waiting lists, but the actual number of people treated. That is the point at which the human stories of pain and suffering are dealt with. We hear too little of the successes of the health service from Opposition Members and too much about problems which they have no idea how to tackle.

I am pleased about the way in which the Government have dealt with the problem identified by the Select Committee and have tried to tackle waiting lists. I want to refer to several parts of the Government's national programme to tackle that problem.

The special management teams that were sent in to investigate the worst lists halved the number waiting more than one year in 43 long lists in 1989-90. Provisional figures for 1990-91 show that they reduced long waits in the worst 100 lists by 36 per cent. Those are not simply statistics—there is a human case behind each one.

The special waiting list fund of £190 million over the four years 1987-88 to 1990-91 has helped health authorities to treat more than 300,000 extra in-patients and day cases and more than 200,000 out-patients from waiting lists.

The special team led by John Yates, which the Government acknowledged and expected would do its work more efficiently than some health authorities, has had a profound effect on identifying and dealing with the problems. I pay tribute to the Government's work in tackling those problems and to the identification and acknowledgement given to them in the Select Committee's report.

We all want to concentrate on our own areas. That is where we see the health service in practice most often. We can deal with global and national statistics as much as we like, but what is really important is what is happening in our own back yards. In that respect, I draw the attention of the House to paragraph 49 of the Select Committee's report which deals with improved management and co-operation with clinicians. That paragraph deals with the importance of management and staff getting together to cut down waiting lists and to deal with the problems.

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

Paragraph 51 contains an encouraging quotation from Mr. Edwards of Trent regional health authority who, referring to the conversations that are now being held between administrators and doctors, asks:

"'How can we together manage this important part of our business?' This is the first time this has happened in 30 years, and for me this is one of the most exciting bits of the new world [the NHS reforms]; managers and doctors getting together to share a view about the way forward."

In no other district has that spirit, which is wanted and desired by both the Select Committee and the Government, been put into practice to more effect than in my own authority of Bury, and I pay tribute to Bury district health authority for that.

I shall first give some statistics about Bury's waiting lists and then say how it has tackled them and how that work might be affected by future policies. We want to talk about waiting lists—and this is Bury's story. The hon. Member for Peckham said that there was no district health authority in the country that did not have a waiting list for general surgery. She is wrong—there is mine. In 1989, 86 per cent. of patients for general surgery waited less than three months. In 1990-91, no patient waited for more than three months for general surgery. The hon. Lady might say that a wait of nought to three months is still a waiting list, and that is fine, if that is what she wishes to do, but to most people the fact that no patient has waited longer than three months for general surgery means that there is no waiting list.

In 1989, 84 per cent. of ear, nose and throat patients waited less than 12 months, with 30 patients waiting more than a year. In 1991, that had improved to 98 per cent. of patients waiting less than 12 months, with only seven waiting between one and two years and none waiting more than two years. In the three years 1988-91, between 99 and 100 per cent. of orthopaedic patients waited less than two years and there was a decrease in the number of people waiting for more than 12 months, from 49 in 1989 to only three in 1991. In oral surgery, between 1989 and 1990, 100 per cent. of patients waited less than three months. Again, I submit that that is no waiting list. In 1991, only one patient waited between three and six months while the rest waited less than three months. In 1989, 97 per cent. of gynaecology patients waited less than 12 months, with nine patients waiting for more than a year. In 1990-91, there was a further improvement, with no one waiting for more than 12 months.

That is the record of just one district—Bury district health authority in the north-west. I submit that those statistics on waiting lists would stand comparison with figures anywhere in the world. The way in which those statistics have been achieved is worthy of comment because that is what is at the heart of paragraph 49 of the report, which deals with the improved co-operation between administrators and doctors. That is what has happened in my district in the past decade or so.

How has the district achieved that? First, it has been committed to reform—to the sort of reforms that are now being discussed as possible ways forward. Bury district health authority has always been open to following through any reforms in an effort to try to improve its service. Secondly, there has been a commitment to competitive tendering to which I shall return later. In Bury, 17 services have been put out to competitive tender, resulting in savings of hundreds of thousands of pounds for the health authority each and every year, which might stand to be lost in the future. I should be interested to hear the hon. Member for Peckham explain how that shortfall might be made up if competitive tendering ends.

However, more important than those two matters and the statistics is the way in which Bury health authority has managed its services because that is the key to how it has been able to treat more patients and why it has fewer waiting lists. First, there has been an increase of 43 per cent. in the number of doctors employed. Additional consultants have been appointed, all in the specialties where waiting lists have been reduced in accident and emergency services; anaesthetics; paediatrics; obstetrics and gynaecology; radiology; geriatrics; psychiatry; pathology; ear, nose and throat; adult health and orthopaedics. These are not just statistics—real doctors have been appointed. Our waiting lists have fallen because our health authority has had the funds to employ them.

Secondly, we in Bury have been able to commit £25 million to capital expenditure in the past few years to provide the facilities for the operations that will help us to reduce waiting lists. Some of that money has been provided through savings on the health authorities' own resources—achieved by such things as competitive tendering. The savings have not just been a nebulous figure that has somehow gone into somebody's pocket; they have been used for a new obstetrics unit so that more people can be treated and the waiting lists can be reduced.

In 1978-79, some 17,780 in-patients were treated and there were 1,575 day cases. The latest figures show an increase to 26,700 in-patients and 4,100 day cases. That represents a total increase over 10 years of 55 per cent. in the number of in-patients, and 160 per cent. in the number of day cases treated. If the Government and the Select Committee want waiting lists to be reduced, the way is through co-operation between the doctors and the administrators in health authorities, such as happens in Bury. Our policies, together with the attention being paid to waiting lists during the past few years, are doing the job. The Conservative party has ideas, facts, statistics and achievements. All we hear from the hon. Member for Peckham is criticism—not a single idea about how to deal with the problems that we are tackling.

I worry about the future, and about what will happen if the policies that we have put into effect were no longer followed. If the economy cannot provide the growth which it has provided over the past 10 years, and which has allowed expenditure in our health authorities to rise by 19 per cent.—under the previous Labour Government NHS spending in Bury fell by 2 per cent.—my constituents would be badly disadvantaged and waiting lists would rise again. I do not want my constituents to face that risk.

The abolition of competitive tendering would mean the loss of hundreds of thousands of pounds for my health authority, and I see no commitment to make up that loss. Whose waiting lists would rise first to deal with that change in policy? Such facts and figures make a compelling case for what we are doing to tackle waiting lists. We do not have just rhetoric; we have achievements, determination and a commitment to the health service that I suspect Labour Members only dream about. They wish that they could actually deliver what they say, but they know that only the Conservative party can do that.

On waiting lists, on the Select Committee report, and on the way in which problems are tackled, only the

Conservative party shows the determination and the commitment to deal with the human casualties behind the statistics. That is far better than the empty rhetoric that we hear from Labour Members.

9.12 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I shall be brief. I echo the congratulations to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), the Chairman of the Select Committee, and his colleagues on their excellent report on this important matter. The hon. Gentleman opened the debate in splendid fashion and he set the parameters very effectively. For a moment, I thought that he had found the whole debate so moving that he had crossed the Floor of the House, but I see that he has now returned to his usual lair.

It is understandable that in such a debate there should be claims and counterclaims about what is happening in the NHS and about its health or otherwise. However, in discussing waiting lists we would do well to remember what Mr. Yates said in his evidence to the Committee. That was fairly reproduced on page ix of the report, which stated:

"Two issues emerge from his replies. The first was his concern that a large amount of public money had been spent on attempting to reduce the numbers of people waiting over a year for treatment, only to see the numbers rise."

It is worth bearing in mind that rather basic point when listening to some of the claims that are made, not least those of the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt).

Mr. Yates told the Committee:

"I have been concerned about its . . . failure"—

that is, the failure of the waiting list initiative—

"in terms of delivering the goods in terms of what was expected . . . in the first three years it has been somewhat of a disappointment to see that the Department of Health investment of (£80·6 million) has led to a rise in the generally accepted measure to waiting time, the number of long wait patients, waiting over a year."

That is not much of a success story—and it came from the man who was in charge of trying to deliver an improved service and who, indeed, went a long way towards achieving that.

The Committee mentioned the need for a good, high-quality flow of information. That is certainly crucial. As I have said in other health debates, I am worried about what will happen under the new arrangements—an internal market, self-governing trusts, GP budget-holding and so forth. Although finance has been made available, I do not think that the computer technology is advanced enough for, in particular, the big hospitals to be able to evaluate their own information systems as professionally as they do now. They could have an important effect on waiting lists.

I am glad that the Committee, in dealing with developments in the primary-care sector, drew attention specifically to the contrast between rural and urban needs. Because I represent a vast rural area, I am especially conscious of that distinction. There is no doubt, however, that that blanket or blueprint approach should not be adopted to that important function of the health service; the position in, for instance, the Scottish highlands is not the same as the position in one of our cities. I am encouraged to note that the Government have responded positively to what the Committee said.

Let me echo what was said by the hon. Member for Macclesfield by quoting from point 15 of the Department of Health's response:

"Management is also responsible for ensuring that private practice does not, to a significant extent, interfere with the performance of the function of the health service".

How right the hon. Gentleman was to remind us that there should be no interference with the performance of the health service, and that non-paying patients should not be disadvantaged. I hope that the Minister, too, will emphasise that; after all, taxpayers' money is being spent. The Select Committee is right to be concerned about efficiency and value for money.

Like every other debate that we have had about the health service, this one is ultimately concerned with finance. The Select Committee said that more finance was available for the waiting list initiative; in their response, the Government said that they did not feel that that was viable at this stage in the financial year, and gave various other reasons.

There is no doubt that health care is a bottomless pit, which, by definition, can never prove 100 per cent. satisfactory. As soon as a procedure is discovered, whereby a physical ailment or deficiency can be cured, a new waiting list is created. We appreciate that; but Conservative Back Benchers who retail the more repeatable details of their trips to Scandinavia, drawing telling contrasts between British and Swedish health care, should bear in mind the fact that Scandinavian countries —and most other developed countries that can be compared with Britain—spend a much larger proportion of their gross domestic product on health care. That is why it is right to continue to underscore the need for more cash for the waiting list initiative. Although we want value for money and quality, we cannot escape the argument about quantity.

In highlighting those and many other points, which I do not have time to touch on tonight, the Select Committee has performed to its credit and I commend its report.

9.20 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate the Select Committee on its excellent report and the Government on their positive response. The speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) was, to put it crudely, a cop-out. It totally lacked any details about policy. Considering that the subject under discussion was money, it was a bit cheap of the hon. Lady not to respond to my request for some details.

All hon. Members understand the trauma that someone experiences when they are on a waiting list for an operation. I have been fortunate as I have never been admitted to hospital for an operation. Obviously, patients want the operation to be carried out as quickly as possible. However, it is totally irresponsible for any politician to pretend that there is an easy answer to enable a patient to have that operation quickly.

I am privileged to have in my constituency one of the finest hospitals in the country—Basildon hospital. I regret the way in which local Labour and Alliance politicians try to run down our excellent hospital. Basildon hospital is at the bottom of my garden. My family uses its services. My wife has had four babies there under the excellent national health service and, God willing, she will have a fifth in September. My family has used its excellent accident and emergency unit——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Were all the babies accidents?

Mr. Amess: None of our children were accidents. We regard every one of them as a blessing. In two weeks' time, the Duke of Kent will open our brand new accident and emergency unit. My wife had an ear operation in our excellent hospital. My constituents are extremely proud of their hospital.

Hon. Members can imagine my anger when one of those ridiculous health monitoring committees was set up by the local Labour party. The chairman—or chair, as he likes to be called—used to be employed by our hospital, when he was in charge of the private patients' waiting list. When he was working at the hospital he considered it acceptable that the hospital admitted private patients but as soon as he left he immediately castigated private health care.

I hope that the hon. Member for Peckham will soon return to her place because she and I were on a Committee of this House two or three years ago when the Government first announced the waiting list option. Walworth road, bless its heart, undertook the initiative of spewing out literature highlighting waiting lists in various hon. Members' constituencies. One such list referred to my constituency.

In the 1987 general election campaign, when the Opposition guns were firing at me, the then Opposition spokesman—I think that it was the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—came to my constituency and found a child who had been waiting for rather a long time to have an operation. The national newspapers took up the child's plight and highlighted it during the campaign. As soon as the campaign was over and I was returned as hon. Member for Basildon, the Opposition ducked the issue and I was left to deal with it, which I did successfully.

I am delighted that there have been major reductions in the size of waiting lists during the past year in the hospital in my constituency. It has achieved the biggest overall reduction out of 15 districts in the Thames region. If we compare March 1991 figures with those for one year earlier, there were nearly 2,000 fewer people on the waiting list—a reduction of one quarter. That is why I did not respond to the point that I think that the hon. Member for Peckham had in mind when I tried to intervene. There are nearly 1,600 fewer people waiting longer than one year —a reduction of more than one half.

Mr. Gill: Does my hon. Friend accept that the statistics that he has just given are not isolated examples? In Shropshire, the county from where I come, the total waiting list for operations is down by 32 per cent. and the number of people waiting for more than one year has been reduced by 67 per cent.

Mr. Amess: Those figures are quite magnificent and I join my hon. Friend in saluting his local authority, and the men and women who work at his local hospital who have achieved such excellent results.

In Basildon, there has been a 37 per cent. reduction in the number waiting for general surgery, a 20 per cent. reduction in those waiting for ear, nose and throat treatment and a 10 per cent. reduction in those waiting for oral surgery and orthopaedic surgery.

In Basildon, we have already adopted many of the recommendations in the report of the Select Committee on Health. All waiting lists are now routinely checked to ensure that those on them still need the operation. We have increased medical staff in problem sectors. A new consultant oral surgeon, whom the authority shares with Southend health authority, started in August 1990. New consultant posts were created in urology and plastic surgery in April 1991. The additional urology service set up in January 1991 resulted in more operations during the first three months.

Basildon has "short notice" waiting lists for filling last minute cancellations by patients. It gives appropriate notice of admission to ensure a minimum number of cancellations by patients. It has matched theatre capacity to bed availability. It has blitzed problem sectors of the list such as special sessions for day case urology. It has reduced "bed blocking" by returning patients to their home with proper support in order to free acute beds more quickly. It has introduced new clinical techniques and increased the use of day care surgery.

For 1991-92, Basildon and Thurrock health authority has obtained from the North East Thames regional health authority the following waiting list initiative funds: more than £500,000 to build and equip a dedicated day surgery unit at Orsett hospital; £12,000 to purchase arthroscopy equipment, used in the examination of joints; £28,000 for a hysteroscope to enable gynaecology surgical procedures to be carried out on an out-patient day-case basis; and £30,000 for equipment to enable key-hole surgery to remove gall bladders, substantially reducing average lengths of stay for such procedures and reducing the trauma.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to the former chairman of our health authority, Mrs. Joan Martin, the acting chairman, Mr. Gould, and the hospital manager, Ken Sharp. On 1 April 1992, the hospital will apply to become a national health service trust and the application is supported by local hospital doctors, nurses and managers, who believe that when it becomes a trust it will bring benefits to patients and staff, and a guarantee of job security to all those who work at the hospital. When I open the hospital fete on Saturday I shall thank all the women and men for their efforts in seizing the Government's initiative and reducing hospital waiting lists so dramatically in Basildon.

9.28 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the debate. In addition to debating the Select Committee's report on waiting lists we were also meant to look at the evidence taken by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. I am disappointed to have been called as late as this in the debate.

We have completed our evidence on elective surgery in Wales. Rather than taking a wide-brush approach I shall concentrate on an initiative unique to Wales which the Welsh Office, to its credit, has innovated—the three all-Wales regional specialist treatment centres: at Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor we looked at ophthalmology, at the Prince of Wales hospital at Rhydlafar in Cardiff we looked at hip and knee replacement surgery, and at Bridgend hospital we looked at hernia and varicose vein surgery. It is fascinating to see England lagging so far behind in this area.

It has given me great satisfaction to promote these centres in Gower, as I have visited all three and can vouch for the superb quality of service attained. Less than two

weeks ago I was privileged to witness the brilliant skills of Mr. Mehta, one of the three consultant ophthalmic surgeons at Ysbyty Gwynedd, carrying out cataract surgery followed by lens implant. It was obvious from my visits that the work of the treatment centres brings about dramatic improvements in the quality of people's lives.

The issue that deserves full attention is that of how to increase the number of patients treated so that human suffering, often for long periods, may be alleviated. It is significant that Mr. John Yates, giving evidence before the Welsh Select Committee, estimated that the more than 11,000 people waiting in Wales for more than a year for elective surgery could have their operations and treatment in only three weeks' work by the surgeons that specialise in their conditions. If the treatment centres are to be truly successful in dramatically reducing waiting lists, I believe that the Welsh Office must institute six changes.

First, the Welsh Office must commit itself to a future period for funding that is radically different from the present one, so that general practitioners and consultants know that post-operative, follow-up care will be available at centres on a long-term basis. The Minister and the Welsh Office must be more definite than they were in the parliamentary reply that the Minister gave me on 29 April. He must no longer be prepared to offer the type of parliamentary reply that he gave me on 3 May, which showed that the throughput targets for 1991-92 are yet to be agreed.

In passing I must also mention the need for the Welsh Office to have a care about the temptation now and again to rewrite history. Mr. John Wyn Owen, director of the NHS in Wales, informed the Public Accounts Committee in a letter of 3 April 1991—it is reprinted in appendix 1 of the Select Committee's report—that the orthopaedic treatment centre at Rhydlafar had a contracted throughput in 1990-91 of 172 hip replacements, 29 knee replacements and 44 other operations. But in a parliamentary reply to me on 3 May 1991, only a month later, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales gave the throughput for 1990-91 at the same hospital as 233 hip replacements, 57 knee replacements and 73 other procedures. Great care must be exercised when bandying about information like that.

Secondly, the Minister must insist that any patient who has waited for more than four months on a consultant's waiting list, as specified in the contract between the Welsh Office and the three treatment centres, is automatically informed by the local consultant that he can be referred to the treatment centre. That will get rid of the widespread practice among GPs and consultants of presenting the options to their patients as either a long wait or private treatment. The treatment centres exist, so this could be a constructive way forward.

Thirdly, Welsh Office funding must be made available to ensure that the waiting period after the patient has been referred to the treatment centre is short. Last week I was told that one of my constituents from the village of Pontarddulais had been referred by his GP to Rhydlafar hospital for a knee joint operation. The hospital sent the referral back to the GP, saying that no more knee operations could be carried out on any patient in Wales for the remainder of the financial year 1991-92, no matter how severe the pain and suffering of the patient. Officials might find that amusing, but I do not. We are only three months into the financial year.

Expectations for early treatment should not be cruelly raised only for people to see their hopes dashed because the quota for knee surgery for the current year seems to be a miserly 50 for the whole of Wales. The quota for hip operations is only 160. According to the figures given to me on 3 May, that compares with 233 hip operations, 57 knee operations and 73 other procedures carried out last year. Obviously there is a decline. How can the Minister rest content when East Dyfed health authority has already taken up its quota of one knee and five hip operations? Is he content that Clwyd has already taken up its quota of two hip and two knee operations or with the 37 hip and five knee operations by West Glamorgan health authority, while the much less populated Pembrokeshire health authority area benefits disproportionately with 26 hip and 11 knee operations?

The answer for orthopaedics seems straightforward. When I visited the hospital at Rhydlafar I saw the obvious need to use the two main theatres exclusively for major joint surgery. To achieve that simple goal, the so-called plaster theatre could be a dedicated theatre for minor joint surgery performed on a day basis. It is also obvious that an empty ward is available to complement the additional theatre, enabling a substantial increase in major joint surgery. It is imperative that the present level of major joint work at Rhydlafar be substantially raised. I urge the Minister to raise it to as many as 1,200 operations a year and seriously to consider making the hospital a major centre.

Fourthly, a time bomb is ticking away in orthopaedics, and it is the time bomb of hip and knee replacement revisions, for which the Minister needs an action plan. Within 10 years of a major joint replacement, 10 per cent. of patients have to be revised with another 10 per cent a year after that requiring revision. Thus within 20 years of the initial major joint replacement surgery, all patients will need revision surgery. The Secretary of State for Wales must prepare for the setting up of joint revision centres in Wales together with specialist surgeons and the necessary infrastructure. As he knows, the Welsh Office contract with the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital does not permit revisions. That issue must be addressed.

Fifthly, if the treatment centres are to be truly Welsh regional centres they must not be permitted to discriminate in favour of the host authority. Allowing Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor to treat 306 patients for cataracts between 1 September 1990 and 31 March 1991, with only 23 residents outside Gwynedd being treated and only three of those residents from the county of West Glamorgan, was a major blot on the Welsh Office. That happened when 1,345 patients were waiting for non-urgent ophthalmic treatment at Singleton hospital, 476 of whom had been waiting for more than a year.

Sixthly, the Minister must move ahead quickly to establish the second specialist centre for cataract treatment at Bridgend general hospital. It would be useful to know the time scale for that.

I am delighted that the Welsh Office has set up treatment centres. I think that it is a major step forward in the reduction of waiting lists. England should learn from what the Welsh have done. In terms of the Select Committee's report, the fundamental issue is that the Minister for Health and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales must be extremely careful, if they decide quickly —perhaps too quickly—to adopt what the Audit Commission says about day surgery, not to fall into the

[Mr. Gareth Wardell]

trap of failing to provide sufficient support services. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) has drawn attention to that danger.

The Government's response to recommendation No. 12 is the most disappointing of all. When the Minister for Health replies, it would be helpful if she could substitute, even at this late stage, something for the comment with which the Government end their response. In fact, it is a non-response to a vital problem. It reads:

"We expect health authorities and family health service authorities to take account of any increases in day case work when planning primary and community health care services."

That is a blatant disregard of a massive job if day surgery is to be expanded. The members of the Select Committee went to the United States to see the expansion that has taken place there, and particularly to California. We know that without community back-up facilities the day-surgery initiative will never get off the ground in a big way. We must not put the cart before the horse. Instead, we must ensure that the necessary services are provided. That is why the next report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, following the one on elective surgery, will be on community care.

9.42 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): It is a great pleasure to respond to the first report of the new Select Committee on Health. I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) an understanding of the priority that needs to be given to tackling waiting lists in our national health service. There was a waiting list for those who wanted to speak in the debate and I am sorry that there has not been time for all hon. Members to participate.

I have the invidious task of responding in a short time to some of the comments that have been made before leaving time for my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield to respond. I say to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales heard his speech and awaits the Select Committee's report. When he has had the opportunity to read it, he will respond.

There is no doubt that we have heard some excellent speeches this evening. My hon. Friends the Members for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) once again set out their strong commitment to our NHS, to the developments, to the progress and to the challenges. How strongly that contrasts with the whinges of Opposition Members. I would loathe to be a member of the health authority that comes within the area represented by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), or to be in the health service in that area. She seems oblivious to the fact that a day surgery unit is being constructed at the hospital in her constituency at a cost of £9 million. The unit will be completed in the autumn. It is expected that work will start later this year on a new theatre block that will cost £14·8 million. There will be a new AIDS and HIV unit. There will be a great increase in the number of day cases that are treated.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) mentioned the important topic of plastic surgery, which poses some difficult questions in the handling of waiting lists. John Yates questioned our emphasis on the need to be rid of all who find themselves on waiting lists for more than two years. But the hon. Member has forgotten to tell the House that there is an additional registrar and consultant in plastic surgery in her district health authority, a new waiting list scheme for day cases and further initiatives and developments.

Once again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North pointed out, the hon. Member for Peckham ducked putting a figure on the amount by which she believes the NHS to be under-funded. I am surprised that she even failed to rally to the call of her hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who said recently that he thought that an extra £6 billion was in the right ball park.

But we know, as my hon. Friends have pointed out so clearly and forcefully, that every Labour Government, despite their words, policies and commitments, have always left Government with waiting lists longer than they were when they took over. Conservative Governments have consistently reduced waiting lists. I think that all my hon. Friends will agree that the Labour party is essentially a walking waiting list disaster area.

Opposition Members have told us of disasters and of confusing facts and figures. My hon. Friends have pointed out clearly and forcefully the developments that they have seen in their health authority areas. The simple and central fact is that under this Government in-patient waiting lists have fallen by 6 per cent. and 40,000 fewer patients now await in-patient treatment than was the case in 1979.

Long waiting times are falling even more quickly. The latest figures obtained direct from the regions since the Select Committee's report was published show a 19 per cent. fall in long-wait patients—those waiting more than a year—in the year to this April. Those waiting more than two years fell even faster—by 38 per cent. over the same period. Long waiting times are tumbling and that fact should be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The reduction in waiting lists looks all the more impressive in the context of the steady increases in the number of patients being treated. There are 24 per cent. more in-patients than in 1979. That is a substantial figure. Five patients are treated now for every four that were treated then. There are nearly twice as many day cases and 8 per cent more out-patient attendances than in 1979. That is in addition to the phenomenal expansion that we have seen in the family doctor services which have grown faster than any other area of health spending over those years. Not only has the number of patients waiting been reduced, but as a proportion of those being treated it has fallen even faster than the figures show.

One important point that I want to address is the discussion to which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield and other hon. Members referred about the waiting list information being published. We have revolutionised the information available about the health service. When the Labour party was in power there was a fog over the health service, as there was over education and any other area of the public sector. We have created an awareness and an understanding of the resource implications, outputs and waiting lists. But what is important is that under the new regime the waiting list information will, rightly and properly, be held by the purchasing health authority. It is the purchasing health authority that is the champion of its patients and it is the purchasing health authority that is accountable to the Secretary of State.

A misunderstanding may have arisen because the present information is based not on provider units but on provider districts. It is concerned with where the treatment is provided, not where people live. But what is clear, and it is important, is that the information will continue to be available to health authorities to enable them to establish contracts in which they drive waiting times down and seek those improvements.

In all the work of the health authorities we have seen greater pressure put on providers, all of whom will be required to make that information available so that even better quality improvements and waiting times can be achieved. In other words, the new way in which we will collect information will be a major step forward for patients and reduce waiting times still further.

Conservative Members have almost become weary of the debate about resources. Our investment in terms of financial input into the health service scarcely needs repeating. Let me say simply that we are spending £1,000 every second on the health service. In the time that it took my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield to make his speech, another £1·5 million was spent on the health service. A little less than that figure was spent during the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham—and, because of time constraints, my contribution will not produce expenditure anywhere near that figure.

My right hon. and hon. Friends know that it is not only the amount of money that is important but the way that it is spent. Time and again, Labour denigrate management skills, business expertise, and cost-effectiveness. However, we know—and Mersey demonstrated this—that the use of management techniques such as list validation, running a tight ship, and informing patients of their appointment times can ensure efficiency and effectiveness. That makes the health service much more rewarding for those who work in it.

We will soon provide all health authorities with guidance on best practice and principles in managing waiting lists. John Yates showed the way forward by advancing the debate and clarifying the many aspects that must be considered, such as the proper use of nurses, doctors, general practitioners and even booking systems, and the need for proper collaboration between family doctors and hospitals.

I welcomed the comments made by several hon. Members about consultants holding out-patient sessions in GPs' surgeries. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) introduced me to a GP who arranged such sessions in his own surgery. We have seen also GP fundholders driving forward standards, innovating, and devising ways of serving their patients, to provide better health care and a better health service.

We owe John Yates and IACC a great debt of gratitude. I visited Mr. Yates' centre at Birmingham, and he has regularly visited me to discuss his progress. I am pleased that he is now working with the West Midlands regional authority on its waiting lists.

In the early days, the waiting list initiative organised by the health service did not make the same progress that John Yates has achieved, but there can be no doubt that it has taken ownership of the issue of driving down waiting lists. The targets set by the chief executive, regions and districts are being vindicated by the remarkable results now being achieved—such as in Mersey. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield will ensure that his illustrious constituent, Brian Redhead, is made aware of the great progress made by his district health service.

North East Thames region has presented a particularly intractable problem over the years, and right hon. and hon. Members will not need to be reminded of the contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow. However, that region has experienced a remarkable fall of 37 per cent. in the one-year waiting list, and of 58 per cent. in respect of those waiting for more than two years since March 1990. Trent, North Western, and many other regions have made similar excellent progress.

We will build on that progress. This year, a larger amount of money than ever before will be directed at the waiting list initiative, with the £35 million from the Department joined by another £25 million from the regions. I do not accept the suggestion that more resources for the waiting list initiative should be provided from the centre, because our argument is that priority is for the health service to deliver. Above all, it is for district health authorities to seek further improvements, because they are accountable for the time that their patients have to wait.

Our targets are ambitious, but we are confident, because of the success that we have already achieved, that there will be further progress.

A number of hon. Members asked about extra-contractual referrals. The key point about them is that in the past there was no financial benefit for a hospital from another area to receive a patient from outside its district. The money did not follow the patient. This year there has been an unprecedented level of consultation between the district health authorities and local general practitioners about where they wish to refer their patients and about historical patterns. At the same time, money has been kept back from extra-contractual referrals. Urgent cases have to be seen immediately. The debate should not overlook the central point that 50 per cent. of patients are admitted at once and of those who wait another 50 per cent. are treated within five weeks. The debate has concentrated on those whom we all agree have to wait longer than is right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield made a number of other points. He knows that we have made considerable progress over developing job plans for consultants. It is important that their commitment to the NHS is properly understood and recognised. If we are to cut waiting lists, we must ensure that the health team works together as fast and as effectively as it can. My hon. Friend also made an important point about urban and rural areas. I hope that my remarks have already demonstrated to him that different ways of using resources and the NHS team to cut the time that people have to wait are part of our intention to provide better health care.

My hon. Friend mentioned regional centres. They are monitoring the work of the trusts. They are not an essential ingredient of the waiting list initiative. The waiting list initiative is a matter for the entire national health service, not for a particular part of it. We have created 100 fully-funded consultant posts to tackle waiting lists. We have maintained our investment in improved information systems to enable hospitals to manage better. We funded the waiting list helpline with the College of Health and 68 per cent. of GPs are now providing minor surgical procedures. Qa Business Services is now helping us to develop our waiting list work even further.

We fully agree with the Select Committee's view that long waiting lists for treatment are unacceptable. The

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

reduction of waiting times is a key priority for the reformed national health service. We want to put patients first. We can learn from the South Western regional health authority's new idea of a booking system. Reducing waiting times is a key objective of our reforms. Waiting times are tumbling. The reforms that we have introduced will help to drive them down still further.

9.57 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her response to the debate. It is a pity that it was not longer, but that criticism is often levelled by Back Benchers when a number of important questions remain inadequately answered. I come back to a point that both I and other speakers raised forcefully. If the Government are serious about the success of the reforms that they are implementing in the national health service, not just health authorities but fund-holding practices and patients—the clients, the customers—must have the information that is essential if they are to exercise responsible choice and take informed decisions. I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that when waiting lists and times are published they are published on both a provider basis and a purchaser basis.

I return to the point that I made in my speech: if the citizens charter that the Government are so keen should succeed is to be meaningful, there must be a means by which the ordinary citizen—not just health authority officials as purchasers, but doctors acting on behalf of patients and the patients themselves—can exercise rights and have information upon which to exercise those rights.

This has been an interesting debate. It is sad that party politics—almost electioneering—reared its ugly head once or twice in the debate. One or two people who could have made valuable contributions to the debate were not called because of a lack of time. It has been a useful debate and shows just how important Back-Bench Members believe the health service to be. It also shows how important the waiting list is and how important it is to have accurate information not only about the numbers on the list, but about the time that people have to wait.

The debate was concluded, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates), put the deferred Questions on Estimates and Supplementary Estimates (Class IV, Vote 1 and Class XIII, Vote 1) and the remaining estimates appointed for consideration this day.*

Class IV, Vote 1

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £81,404,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on regional development grants, regional selective assistance, selective assistance to individual industries and firms, UK contributions arising from its commitments under the International Natural Rubber Agreements a strategic mineral stockpile, support for the film, aerospace and shipbuilding industries, assistance to redundant steel workers, and other payments.

Class XV, Vote 3

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £421,137,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £161,194,000, be granted to Her Majesty our of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Scottish Office Industry Department on Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise; on regional enterprise grants; on technical and vocational education; on the promotion of tourism; on financial assistance to the electricity industry and local enterprise companies; on residual expenditure for the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board; on roads and certain associated services, including the aquisition of land, lighting, road safety and related services; on assistance to local transport; on support for transport services in the highlands and islands; on piers and harbours, and on certain other transport services and grants; and on other sundry services in connection with trade and industry, etc.

Class XIII, Vote 1

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £9,962,627,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £162,196,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Health on hospital, community health, family health and family health service administration services, and on related services.

Class XVI, Vote 8

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £697,400,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £10,291,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Welsh Office on hospital, community health, family health (part) and family health service administration services and on related services.

MR. SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Question which he was directed to put, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.).*

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £78,863,754,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1992, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 236, 237, 238 and 486.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions and upon the three resolutions yesterday by the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Francis Maude, Mrs. Gillian Shephard and Mr. John Maples.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Mrs. Gillian Shephard accordingly presented a Bill to apply a sum out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on 31 March 1992, to appropriate the supplies granted in this Session of Parliament, and to repeal certain Consolidated Fund and Appropriation Acts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 147].

Manchester (Olympic Bid)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.1 pm

Sir Thomas Arnold (Hazel Grove): I am most grateful for the opportunity to address the House on the subject of inner-city investment, Manchester and the north-west. I have already explained to my hon. Friend the Minister that my purpose in raising the subject on the Adjournment is that I wanted specifically to deal with the Manchester bid for the Olympic games in the year 2000. As I explained in a letter to you, Mr. Speaker, I sought your confirmation that I would be in order to do so. The answer was forthcoming in the affirmative.

At this stage of Manchester's bid, the infrastructure is the vital issue. Great though my respect and affection are for my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, he is not qualified, as I understand it, to deal with these matters. I therefore want to traverse the ground of partnership funding and the other urban funding for which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible, so that we can have a clearer understanding of where the Government stand at present in terms of the applications that are likely to come to them in due course.

It will not surprise you, Mr. Speaker, to know that there is a great deal of public interest, in Greater Manchester and elsewhere, about the nature of Manchester's bid. The previous bid was unsuccessful, but the committee regrouped, and a new proposal found favour with the British Olympic Committee.

I talked to the Gallup polling and opinion research company to see whether it would be sensible to test public attitudes towards the Olympics at this stage. I am most grateful to the chief executive officer, Mr. Gordon Heald, for his co-operation in carrying out, as a public service from Gallup, a preliminary survey of attitudes.

Gallup conducted its survey between 5 and 11 June and asked a series of questions on attitudes to the Olympics and the possibility of their being staged in Manchester. The sample size was 960. First, Gallup asked:

"Do you know which cities or countries are competing to be hosts for the Olympic Games to be held in 2000?"

Some 35 per cent. of respondents mentioned Manchester. Clearly, there is good potential in terms of future awareness of what is being proposed. Ten per cent. cited the unsuccessful bid from London; 7 per cent. cited the USA; 6 per cent., Britain; 6 per cent., Barcelona; 5 per cent., England; 2 per cent., Athens; 1 per cent., Greece; and 1 per cent., Atlanta. I think that 35 per cent. is a respectable starting figure.

Gallup told all those interviewed that Manchester is competing to be the host in 2000 and then asked:

"How likely would you be to visit Manchester to see any of the events?"

Nearly 30 per cent. said that they would be "very" or "fairly" likely to go to Manchester to see some of the events. That underlines the need for early consideration and planning of the infrastructure measures that will be necessary if the bid is to have any hope of success.

Gallup asked respondents:

"How important do you think it is to Britain that Manchester wins the right to be the host in 2000?"

Forty-one per cent. of electors regarded this as "very" important and 36 per cent. as "fairly" important—a combined figure of 77 per cent. Some 51 per cent. of respondents thought that staging the Olympics in Manchester would improve employment prospects for local people a great deal or a fair amount. That again must be of interest to my hon. Friend in evaluating any proposals that come to him for funding through his Department's schemes.

Finally, when Gallup asked:

"How much of the finances to host the year 2000 Olympic Games do you think the Government should give?",

71 per cent. thought that the Government should give some financial help, 16 per cent. thought the Government should pay all the costs and 8 per cent. that it should not pay any.

I draw the attention of the House to the potential for further work on evaluating public attitudes that lies behind those figures. I do not believe that the bid can be successful unless it enjoys widespread public support and, indeed, a clear commitment from the Government that they would like the Olympic games to be staged here.

I recently asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he would specify the full range of grants currently available under his inner-city programme, with a brief technical description of each. I should be most grateful, therefore, if my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us something about the work that he is doing on City Challenge, the urban development corporations, the urban programme, city grant, derelict land grant, city action teams and any other schemes that he thinks may be relevant to the concerns which I know the Olympic bid committee has at present. I should also appreciate it if he said something about the European regional development grant, although not necessarily this evening, if he thinks that inappropriate.

I understand from the Olympic bid committee that three potential sites are under consideration. One of them straddles the boundaries of the city of Manchester and the boroughs of Salford and Trafford. Another, sometimes referred to loosely and colloquially as Eastlands, is on the east side of Manchester, which I believe is already attracting some City Challenge money. The site would be in the area of the Oldham road and Ashton road on the Gorton-Openshaw side of the city. There is another area, referred to loosely as Hough End, which at the moment consists of fields on the way into the city from Ringway airport.

I do not propose to trespass on the constituency of any other hon. Member, so I shall say no more about those sites, except to point out that there is likely to be a very lively debate about which of the three should be chosen and about whether any other sites should be considered for the staging of the Olympic games in the year 2000.

How are the programmes to which I have referred working in practice and what is the take up? That information will begin to give us some idea of the possibilities in terms of the proposals that the committee is likely to make. For example, will there be a mechanism for evaluating whether projects associated with the Olympic bid should qualify for partnership funding and Government help? If the programmes are cash-limited, as I believe they should be, how will the resource implications be discussed within Government?

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already said publicly that he welcomes the Manchester Olympic bid. I believe that in due course he intends to say something further about that bid. Clearly there are some important matters for the Government to deliberate upon.

[Sir Thomas Arnold]

I will want to know at an early stage whether my hon. Friend the Minister will hold regular meetings with the Olympic bid committee organisers.

Attention has also been focused on Liverpool. As I understand it, the bid committee has said that it wants to stage some of the events on Merseyside. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will consider it appropriate to say something about the application of his schemes with regard to Merseyside. However, my hon. Friend also has responsibility for the rest of the north-west. I would appreciate it if he would say something about the scope of his investment programmes elsewhere in the north-west and about whether some of the schemes could be relevant to Olympic events.

All hon. Members believe that the bid deserves a fair wind. No one is arguing that the Government should invest huge sums of public money. Those of us who support the initiative are seeking an early indication from the Government that they will be a willing partner with the members of the bid committee in trying to find solutions to important technical problems which must be overcome at this stage if Manchester's infrastructure is to satisfy the demanding criteria that the International Olympic Committee is bound to place on an application to stage the games. That is why I have raised the issue tonight. A number of complex issues need to be aired publicly at an early stage, and I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) on his good fortune in obtaining the Adjournment debate and on raising a matter which is clearly of great importance to his constituents, to everyone in Manchester and the north-west and to the nation.

As my hon. Friend knows, I have been privileged to spend a good deal of my time over recent months in Manchester. It is a vibrant and multicultural city. One need only think of its range of academic and musical institutions—it now has the largest student campus in Europe—and the pop scene, its media centre and the fact that it is becoming the regional focal point for the arts just as Birmingham and Glasgow have become.

Since I have come to know Manchester so well, I have been constantly impressed by the energy and confidence of the people of the area and their sense of vision and purpose. I have seen many instances of strong practical partnerships not just between central and local government agencies, but between the private sector, voluntary organisations, churches, schools and the whole community in Manchester and Salford which have launched and sustained many exciting projects.

Only last week I spent a lively hour at Trinity high school, which is a voluntary aided school in Hulme. I was very impressed not only by the long list of academic achievements, but by the sheer energy and enthusiasm of the pupils and staff alike. That school has parent-community involvement as well as business and industry involvement in the shape of a compact. The youth of today are the statesmen of tomorrow and this school is equipping its pupils with the skills which will make them independent, well-balanced adults.

Also last week I attended a meeting to discuss environmental improvements to the M602, a dreary entrance to both Salford and Manchester. There were people there from the local authority, central Government, the Tidy Britain Group, the Groundwork Trust, Manchester polytechnic students, with their imaginative scheme, and local employers. We were all working towards the same end: how to turn that bleak stretch of urban motorway into an attractive approach to the heart of Manchester.

Nowhere is this sense of common purpose better demonstrated than in the activities of the Manchester Olympic bid commmittee. Its bid to host the 1996 Olympic Games was widley praised for its vision and its integrity. Although that bid did not succeed in bringing the Olympic Games to Britain for the first time since 1948, it spread the message of Manchester's economic revival across the world and reminded many people of the rich sporting heritage to be found not only in Manchester, but in Great Britain as a whole. Manchester's latest bid, which was endorsed by the British Olympic Association on 24 April this year, opens up exciting prospects for the city, other local authorities in the conurbation, the north-west region and throughout Britain. I am sure that the bid committee will build upon the foundations of its previous bid, and I am pleased to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Duke of Westminster and his bid team.

A successful bid, well executed, would be a great boost to the regional economy and urban regeneration in Manchester and the north-west. I have, for example, seen estimates that suggest that the event could add £0·5 billion to United Kingdom invisible exports. Moreover, there is a growing self-confidence that Manchester can take its rightful place as a major European city with all that that could bring in terms of international recognition and investment. The very process of mounting the bid is likely to improve further the international profile of the city.

The Government therefore wish Manchester every success with the bid. My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has already met the chairman of the bid committee and the secretary of the BOA to discuss how best the Government can help to promote Manchester's bid. I have, of course, pledged my support to Bob Scott and the Manchester committee.

Partnership is a common theme of our whole approach to investment and regeneration, but we are demanding of our many partners in the regeneration process. We expect local commitment, participation, value for money and well-constructed ideas that are capable of implementation. I welcome the approach that has been adopted by the Olympic bid committee. Its strong emphasis on private sector participation, in line with Manchester city's historical entrepreneurial traditions, should produce the ideas, commitment and investment that will make the games a success. I understand that the Olympic bid committee is already engaged in the search for a suitable site for the main stadium and arena. In addition to sites at Barton Cross, the subject of last year's bid, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, there may be a possibility in east Manchester. A successful bid could make a worthwhile contribution to the regeneration of that area, which I know is now being closely examined by Manchester city council and the private sector, led by Terry Thomas.

I am pleased to report that my Department has recently agreed in principle to help with the cost of studies into the potential reclamation of part of the area. I welcome the city council's intention to consider east Manchester as a candidate for City Challenge next year. We shall examine closely any bids that we receive for support for Olympic facilities either in the context of City Challenge or separately.

However, my prime responsibility is for the regeneration of inner-city areas. My Department will play its part through the normal mechanisms and criteria that are designed to encourage greater economic activity in urban areas, especially on underused or derelict land. I encourage the bid committee to do what it can to ensure that there is sufficient developer interest to provide a suitable venue for major sporting events in the north-west. I look forward to hearing from the bid committee when its plans are more advanced.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, whom I am delighted to see on the Treasury Bench, has already taken a lively interest in the Olympic bid and, because we have discussed this together, I know that he is aware that the Central Manchester urban development corporation is also closely involved and playing its role.

Moreover, the Government have pledged themselves to a major programme of infrastructural and environmental works in the north-west within the time scale of the Olympic bid. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), when he was Secretary of State, spoke of a further £3 billion improvement programme when he addressed the Olympic committee in Tokyo last year—where he had gone to express the Government's commitment to that bid. This is already under way, and the effects will become increasingly evident over the next few years. Our attention has not been confined to Manchester; we have worked through the Merseyside development corporation and increasingly in collaboration with the local authorities to regenerate Merseyside. That approach, building on the great warmth and energy of the people of Merseyside, has begun to unlock the enormous potential of one of our nation's major conurbations. Of course, resources are also being targeted to the shire districts of the region; for example, almost £20 million has been allocated this year for transport supplementary grant, and further resources are being spent through derelict land grant and estate action programmes.

I am proud to be a member of a Government who have invested heavily in the regeneration of the north-west, in its inner-city areas, in its infrastructure, and in its environment—and that means in its people. The Government have done so by carefully targeting public resources and by levering in the private sector. We have created the conditions necessary for initiatives to flourish. The Olympic bid team are among those who have benefited from that approach, not only because of the physical transformation of many areas, which will directly enhance the bid, but because it is a partnership that draws together all sectors of the community and the economy. The job has only just started, but the Government have a continuing programme of investment and initiatives to tackle it.

One of the first things that was evident to me when I became inner-city Minister for Manchester and Salford was how rundown areas could be transformed by imagination, the strong commitment of local people and careful targeting of resources. One only has to visit the north-west region's three development corporation areas, with combined annual budgets of more than £72 million, to see the progress taking shape. Before the year 2000, and the Olympic games, the corporations expect to lever in £1·6 million of private investment. More than 620 hectares of derelict land will have been reclaimed and major infrastructure works will have been undertaken.

Since 1988, more than £139 million has been spent in the north-west's inner-city areas, excluding Merseyside, through the urban programme. Of that, almost £25 million has been spent on directly enhancing the environment, and £58·3 million has been spent on renewing the local economic infrastructure. The urban programme has levered in at least an equivalent amount of private investment in those areas. More than £56 million of city grant has been awarded to private sector companies in the north-west, which are investing more than £301 million of private money in a wide range of urban regeneration projects. Those projects are providing new homes, new jobs, new hotels, refurbishing listed buildings and reclaiming derelict sites.

The Government have allocated the main share of derelict land resources, almost £26 million, to the north-west region this year. Emphasis is being given to schemes that enhance the local environment and 10 rolling programmes are operating in those areas where the problems are most severe. We have been vigorously tackling, on a wide front, the problems posed by rundown council estates. The Government's estate action programme demands a strategic approach to turning round deprived areas, and seeks to incorporate wider proposals to secure comprehensive regeneration. Physical improvements alone are not the answer—estate action assists in the development, in tandem, of proposals for dealing with social, economic and environmental problems. Since 1986, the Government have provided resources totalling £805 million for estate action, of which no less than a third has gone to the north-west.

The Mersey basin campaign, a 25-year, £4 billion, initiative, is using central, local authority and private sector funds to regenerate the watercourses of the River Mersey through river and canal improvements and waterfront-linked schemes. North-West Water plans to spend £4·3 billion to improve water and waste services throughout the region over the next decade. That compares with £1 billion in the 1970s and £2 billion in the 1980s. A major part of the spending programme will be on environmental improvements.

We have established an impressive record of Government inner-city and environmental investment, which is continuing to transform the region, not by throwing money at the problem—an approach which had singularly failed in the past—but through imagination, strong local commitment, and careful targeting of cash.

My hon. Friend will be aware of particular examples in which the Government's approach and policies have been brought together to achieve fundamental changes to formerly neglected areas. One of the best-known examples, Salford Quays, has benefited from £28 million of derelict land and urban programme grant. That has attracted private investment of £293 million—with more to come—and has transformed a derelict inner-city area, providing homes, offices, hotels and leisure facilities.

[Mr. Robert Key]

The Government are not content to rest on what they have achieved so far; new ideas are needed to continue the transformation of our inner-city areas. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced the City Challenge, in which 15 councils around the country have been invited to bid for a share of £75 million next year —and the same amount each year for five years—to build on the success that has been achieved to date. Central to that partnership initiative are a strong vision for the future of the cities involved, participation by all sectors of society, a clear timetable and effective delivery mechanisms.

Within the Manchester conurbation, both Manchester and Salford city councils have been invited to compete. I am to receive their detailed bids tomorrow and, whether or not either authority is successful on this occasion, there will be a further opportunity to compete next year. I have seen both areas, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows them well. The work that has already been undertaken to mount the bid has begun to mobilise the wealth of untapped talent, expertise and local pride that I know exists in the region.

My hon. Friend mentioned the possibility of ERDF money. That may be a suitable way in which to support the cost of the games, although Manchester will need to find the necessary capital cover from its existing allocations and secure the agreement of its partners in the Manchester, Salford and Trafford areas. To date, no such applications have been made. As I said, we shall pay careful attention to any that are made.

We are at the beginning of the process. I have tried to set out the ground, so that we are all clear about exactly where we are starting from. We shall continue to listen with considerable sympathy and—more important, I hope —with enthusiasm; we shall also maintain a practical commitment to the Manchester bid team. One of the team's challenges will be to recognise that at some point the Manchester bid may have to become the national bid, and we shall be interested to observe how the team deals with that.

Let me again congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this issue. I assure him that my ministerial colleagues and I will continue to support the bid committee's sterling efforts to bring the Olympic games to Britain—and to the north-west—in the year 2000.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 5 July 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Cats (Protection)

9.35 am

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I beg leave to present a petition that has been signed by more than 311,000 people, and which is submitted by the Cats Protection League. The petition urges the Government that

The minimum age for the possession and use of air weapons and crossbows be raised to seventeen.

The sale of air weapons, crossbows and ammunition by mail order be prohibited.

The penalty on conviction for misuse of air weapons and crossbows to include confiscation of said weapons and any ammunition.

In essence, the petition is about protecting people, especially children, and family pets such as cats and dogs.

I beg leave to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Horses (Export)

9.36 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of Vivien Mary Fisher, of Straw House farm, Ripon, North Yorkshire. She represents 250,000 people, whose petition was delivered to No. 10 Downing street by the noble Lord Oaksey, myself and Desert Orchid—a very great horse—last Saturday. The petition concerns the vital need to maintain minimum values for the export of horses, or a suitable equivalent protection, after 1992. People of all sections of our community, of all parties, of all sexes, and of all ages, are anxious and determined about the matter. The petition is vital.

The petition is addressed

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

It

sheweth that due to European Community law this country may lose existing legislation known as Minimum Values in the Animal Health Act 1981 which gives power to protect equines of low value from live transportation to other countries for ultimate slaughter.

We believe that that travel is likely to be seriously inhumane, and the ultimate slaughter also seriously inhumane and upsetting to the animals and to the people of this land.

Wherefore your Petitioner prays that your honourable House will urge the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and food to seek and use every means available to prevent a recurrence in the trafficking of low valued equines to other countries and moreover to continue to make such effort until a satisfactory conclusion has been arrived at in accordance with the opinion of equine welfare organisations. And your Petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

I beg leave to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Townmead School, West Drayton

9.38 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of the parents, pupils and staff of Townmead school, West Drayton, in the county of Middlesex. The petition states

The Townmead School has decided, following a ballot of the parents and children attending the School, to apply for Grant Maintained Status as Heathrow City Technology College, and that some 98 per cent. of those voting supported this proposition, and that the School has the support for this application from leading industrialists in West Drayton and the area around Heathrow Airport, who recognise the vital importance of the School providing a pool of well educated young people, able to play their part in sustaining the competitive status of industry and commerce locally.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will request the Secretary of State for Education and Science to reach a decision on their application before the School breaks up for the summer holidays on the 23rd July 1991, bearing in mind that the statutory period for consultation for this application expired on the 26th May 1991, and that the statutory period for consultation on a proposal by the Hillingdon Education Committee to close the School expired on the 30th June 1991. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

I beg leave to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 3

SHORT TITLE, INTERPRETATION AND EXTENT

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 26, at end insert——

("( ) This Act shall come into force at the end of the period of two months beginning with the day it is passed.")

9.40 am

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Davies: Both amendments were added by the Government during the Bill's passage through another place. They are technical, inasmuch as they do not interfere with the Bill's main purpose but relate to the date of implementation of the measures that it contains. They neither weaken the Bill nor strengthen it, so it may seem odd that I should propose their adoption.

It was not considered necessary so to amend the Bill when it passed through this House, when Ministers suggested a large number of amendments to make the Bill acceptable to the Government. I accepted them in good faith, and the Bill proceeded without delay with all-party and Government support. In all my discussions with Ministers and officials at the Department of the Environment, there was never any suggestion that the amendments now before the House would be necessary. Neither has the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds —the Bill's principal architect—considered that such amendments are necessary.

It is, however, a fact of political life that no private Member's Bill can reach the statute book without the Government's support or acquiescence—and as the Government want the amendments, I am willing to accept them. I do so not because I believe that they will improve the Bill, but because that is what I must do if it is to be enacted.

The Bill was introduced by my friend, the late Member of Parliament for Neath, Donald Coleman, last autumn. If enacted, it will strengthen the protection afforded to wildlife, especially predatory birds, against destruction by the use of illegal poisons—especially pesticides. Acceptance of the amendments will speed the Bill's progress to the statute book, and I have no doubt that, when it receives Royal Assent, it will provide a small but lasting legislative memorial to a former Member of Parliament who was widely respected in all parts of the House.

Amendment No. 1 concerns the date of implementation, and would effectively provide a two-month delay before the Act's provisions come into force. When it was moved in another place by Baroness Blatch, Minister of State, Department of the Environment, it prompted a debate on the merits of an amnesty—a delay in the

implementation of the Act, during which persons in possession of pesticides or poisons used in the past illicitly to poison wildlife could surrender them for safe disposal.

That proposal was firmly rejected by the Minister in another place, who said:

"On Second Reading, the noble Viscount, Lord Falkland, raised the question of an amnesty period for those who have stocks of unwanted pesticides so as to allow those pesticides to be withdrawn. We do not think that an amnesty is necessary."

I draw the attention of the House to that last sentence in particular. The Minister continued:

"However, the two-month period following Royal Assent would enable landowners to reassess their position and that of their employees before the owners themselves become liable for their employees' actions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 May 1991; Vol. 529, c. 188.]

9.45 am

On 21 May, the Minister of State, Department of the Environment said that an amnesty was not necessary, yet on 23 May, the Ministry of Agriculture published the strangely titled document, "Proposals for an approval and consent for the storage and supply of certain pesticides for safe disposal", suggesting precisely that which had been rejected only two days earlier by the Department of the Environment. In that document, MAFF proposed a period for the disposal of

"currently unapproved pesticides from farms to commercial stores . . . prior to safe disposal".

If such a provision was not thought to be necessary on 21 May, according to the Department of the Environment, why was the reverse thought to be true on 23 May, according to the Ministry? Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State will answer that point when he replies.

The Minister of State's statement that

"the two-month period following Royal Assent would enable landowners to reassess their position"

sounds sinister. Does the Department have evidence that landowners have hitherto been guilty of the practices that the Bill will make illegal? If so, those landowners have been causing their employees to commit offences. Can the Department produce evidence that that has occurred? If the Department is aware of such malpractices—which are already offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981—what action has it taken, and what prosecutions have been brought?

Is it intended that the amnesty that the Ministry suggests will operate to coincide with the two-month delay in the Act's implementation on which the Department is insisting? Once the Bill receives Royal Assent, will the Ministry and the Department get their act together and ensure that the amnesty is publicised? It will only work if it is properly publicised.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman means by the word "amnesty". My understanding is that—in common with the practice adopted for much other legislation—Royal Assent will be followed by a period of two months before the Act comes into force. That is standard practice in many other instances. The hon. Gentleman's use of the word "amnesty" suggests that he expects that actions that are already offences under legislation will be included in his so-called amnesty. I cannot believe that that is what he requires.

Mr. Davies: Certainly not, and I apologise if I have confused the hon. Gentleman. My intention is to encourage the Minister to clarify what appears to be an area of confusion between the Ministry and the Department.

In another place, Lord Falkland suggested a two-month amnesty during which those in possession of pesticides—the ownership of which is not in itself illegal—would be encouraged to surrender them for proper disposal. There is no suggestion that ownership of such products per se should be made illegal.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Mr. Davies: I am quite happy to give way. We have plenty of time this morning. I understand exactly what is happening, and I am prepared to play along for a reasonable length of time. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) acknowledges the point that I am making—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted to have that assurance from the Minister—that he is anxious to get the measure on the statute book. Perhaps he will use the good offices of the Government Whip sitting beside him and nodding sagely, to ensure that we make progress.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): I do not quite understand what the hon. Gentleman is getting at when he talks of an amnesty. As he has just said, it is permitted to keep certain substances for certain legal purposes. I therefore cannot see why it should be necessary to have a two-month amnesty—the law is the law. Why should such an amnesty in itself encourage people who possess these substances to hand them in?

Mr. Davies: I am delighted to explain the point to the hon. Gentleman, who takes a close interest in these matters. I must first correct him on a minor point. Many of the pesticides that are most commonly misused are not available for any legal purpose. They are not approved under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for any legal purpose. I have acknowledged that their ownership is not illegal, but their use is. Handing them in was the course of action recommended by the Ministry of Agriculture. The hon. Gentleman's question should more properly be addressed to the Ministry, therefore. Meanwhile, I draw his attention to the circular issued on 23 May 1991 by the Ministry of Agriculture, in which he will note the suggestion that a period be allowed for handing in pesticides for safe storage and destruction.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Is it not at least a possibility that a local police officer may suspect a gamekeeper of indulging in the use of these poisons? By being given this period, the gamekeeper will have the opportunity to show the local constabulary that he is disposing of the pesticides so that he will not be committing an ofence after the two months have elapsed; otherwise, the local police might suspect the gamekeeper of committing an offence—if the Act came into force earlier. A breathing space rather than an amnesty might serve a useful purpose in the rural community.

Mr. Davies: I am glad that my hon. Friend made that telling point. He also alluded to the publicity attendant on the passage of the Bill and to the action that I hope the Ministry will take. For the life of me I cannot understand why the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture cannot get their act together. The Department has said that it supports the measure but that there is no need for an amnesty; at the same time, the

[Mr. Davies]

Ministry, which is responsible for the control and storage of these pesticides, claims that an amnesty is needed. So I suggest that the Minister gets his act together.

If there is to be a two month delay, let us use it for the amnesty suggested by the Ministry of Agriculture. Then, with the publiclity that I hope the Ministry will generate, we can at least start to reduce stocks of substances that are being illegally used if not illegally held.

Mr. Harry Greenway: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on something important by talking about the publicity. The Bill will need publicity to work properly. The people who use these materials are not illiterate but they often do not watch television, listen to the radio or read newspapers, so it is difficult to get across to them the information that they need to avoid getting into trouble. Naturally, I do not wish to be insulting to anyone.

Mr. Davies: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not intend to be insulting, but I disagree with him, because using these pesticides requires some knowledge of their effect and of how to use them to ensure the maximum impact. I am also confident that those who use them for illegal purposes are fully aware that they are doing it against the law. The purpose of the Bill is to extend responsibility. If a gamekeeper is under illegal instructions to use pesticides, once this measure is enacted, not only that gamekeeper but his employer will be responsible in law if it can be shown that the latter knowingly caused or permitted the gamekeeper, on his behalf, to use these poisons. No element of confusion or ignorance can creep in here.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) made a valid point about the publicity surrounding the amnesty. It would allow a gamekeeper who feels threatened or pressurised by his employer to keep down the number of predators or of what are regarded as unwelcome visitors to the moor or the pheasant hatchery to tell his employer that there is an amnesty and to suggest that they take the opportunity it provides to get rid of the pesticides. However much legislation we pass, as long as there are stocks of these highly toxic pesticides the potential for their illegal use remains.

I hope that there is general agreement among hon. Members who have spoken thus far this morning—I also hope that the hon. Member for Upminster, who raised a point of definition, is satisfied with my explanation—that an amnesty will work only if it is properly publicised. Getting the message through to the sort of people likely to have quantities of old pesticides in store is bound to be difficult. Will the Government plan a campaign of publicity and advertising to alert hill farmers and gamekeepers to the amnesty? In his discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture—presumably the two Departments hold discussions—has the Minister decided which chemicals and pesticides will be the subject of such a campaign?

Once the amnesty is over, assuming that there is one, will the Government make it an offence to be in possession of chemicals whose use is no longer legal and which were the subject of the amnesty? I am sure that Conservative Members fully understand that some pesticides cannot be legally used. To own them is not illegal, but if there is evidence that they are being misused, there is surely every good reason to make their ownership illegal.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): By making that request, the hon. Gentleman has cleared up a confusion in my mind concerning what he says about an amnesty. As I understand it, an amnesty is relevant simply to the possession of something that is illegal—for example, the possession of cannabis or firearms. One cannot have an amnesty for things that it is perfectly legal to possess. An amnesty would be relevant only if the point that he made —the possession of substances, the use of which would be illegal—were itself brought into effect.

10 am

Mr. Davies: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, I do not claim credit for the amnesty. That point was made in the other place by Lord Falkland. That was the precise form of words used by the Minister in the other place—he referred to it as an amnesty. The Ministry of Agriculture, has proposed taking that idea forward. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to call it something else, I shall not take issue with him.

As for the illegal holding of poisons and pesticides, will the Minister have a word with his counterpart in the Northern Ireland Office with a view to bringing the law on the use of strychnine, which currently is legal in Northern Ireland, into line with the law in Great Britain, and ensure that the use of strychnine for the above-ground poisoning of wildlife is made illegal in Northern Ireland?

Amendment No. 2 makes it explicit that the legislation shall not be retrospective. Why are the Government suggesting that the amendment is necessary? The Bill already makes it implicit that the proposed measures shall not be retrospective. It is common to all legislation that it shall not be retrospective. How many other private Member's Bills have been amended in this way? Will a similar provision be included in all future Government legislation, making it clear that the proposed provisions are not retrospective? I hope that the Minister will clarify that point when he replies.

I have been privileged to take this measure through the House of Commons. I am grateful for the support that I have received from my hon. Friends and for the somewhat less than wholehearted support of certain Conservative Members. However, their support has been forthcoming. Moreover, I have received every courtesy and assistance from Government Ministers and their staff hitherto. I hope that what has been established thus far will be continued this morning. I look forward to the rapid progress of this measure.

Sir Charles Morrison: As the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) knows, despite his final two sentences' I support the Bill. It is a helpful step forward. I join him in what he said about the late Donald Coleman, but the hon. Gentleman has been a little modest in relation to the part that he has played in helping the Bill through the House, on which he is to be congratulated.

Before the hon. Gentleman began his speech I had questioned why the amendments were necessary. By about halfway through his speech I thought that I understood why amendment No. 1 was necessary, but by the time he ended his speech I was in a greater muddle than I was at the beginning. I think that I understand all that he says

about the ownership of illegal substances and their use and his attempt to draw a distinction between them, but I am still in a bit of a muddle about them.

As for amendment No. 2, it is very important that there should be no possibility of retrospection in the application of the Bill when it becomes an Act, but that must be true —the Minister will correct me in due course if I am wrong —of any legislation that passes through the House. While I have been a Member of Parliament we have occasionally been presented with Bills that imply a degree of retrospection. On such occasions a high proportion of hon. Members have expressed either regret or fury or total opposition to such a prospect. I do not, therefore, understand why amendment No. 2 is necessary.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to be unfair to gamekeepers. The unfortunate reality is that from time to time over the years illegal substances have been used not only by misguided or unwise gamekeepers —who, I am sure, have been told in the vast majority of cases what the law is and who perfectly well understand what the law is—but by other people in certain parts of the country in an attempt to control pests of one sort or another, including perhaps foxes, and to protect lambs and other animals. There is no excuse for anyone to act in breach of the law. The Bill will ensure that there are many fewer breaches of the law. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman should implicitly have picked on one particular group who are responsible—as is recognised by an increasing number of people—for more effective conservation than any other group of people in the land, although I have respect for many other groups.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for being pedantic over one point. He referred to illegal substances being used. It is essential to draw a distinction between legal substances—it is the use of those substances that is illegal—and illegal substances themselves, a distinction which the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) recognised and drew, because he suggested that the possession of some substances should be illegal rather than merely the use of them. That would be to extend the law seriously. Therefore I ask my hon. Friend to say that it is the use of some substances that is illegal rather than the possession of them.

Sir Charles Morrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I concur with what he says. He has clarified in precise terms exactly what the position is.

I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that——

Mr. Ron Davies: I think that *Hansard* will record that I referred to gamekeepers in response to an intervention. I recognise that there are a number of groups of people who misuse products in the way that has been discussed this morning. I was not in any sense singling out gamekeepers for special attention. I was merely using them as one example.

Sir Charles Morrison: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's clarification of that point, which I am sure is helpful and will come as a relief to gamekeepers.

I agree strongly with the hon. Gentleman about the need for co-ordination between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Until the hon. Gentleman drew attention to it, I was not aware that apparently the two Departments do not act as one. Over matters as important as this, it is paramount that they should co-ordinate their activities —and, for that matter, as the hon. Gentleman said, so should the Northern Ireland Office. It is a pity that we do not have a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Minister here today. If we did, the activities of the two Departments could be co-ordinated at this moment on the Treasury Bench. Perhaps, however, I do the two Departments an injustice. In reality they may be co-ordinated, but it seems that until now the two Departments have not acted as one. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to put my worries to rest.

Nevertheless, with or without the amendments, I hope that the Bill quickly becomes an Act.

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). Not for the first time, I join him in supporting conservation measures. I accept that the desirable end of conservation to my mind may not always be the same as his, but I recognise his long commitment. Like him, I do not wish to make a long speech because I support the attitude that my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) took to the amendments.

It is appropriate to refer to Donald Coleman. It seems a long time since Donald and I left the Tea Room to watch last year's draw for private Member's Bills. It seems as long since we discussed what Bill he would choose to introduce. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly for taking over the Bill on behalf of our late and highly esteemed friend.

The Bill attracted Donald not merely because of the wide contribution that it would make, but because one species that needs the additional protection that the Bill confers is the red kite of Wales. There could be no more fitting memorial to Donald, who gave long service to the Principality, than that the red kite should survive in Wales. I hope that when people see the red kite flying in the central mountainous region they will recall that Donald Coleman may have made a significant contribution to its survival.

The Bill goes rather wider than that and it is probably appropriate for reference to be made to an amnesty. I hope that the House will not dwell at length on that. It might have been better to refer to breathing space rather than to an amnesty, with all the overtones that that has.

I echo the point that the hon. Member for Devizes made about the gamekeeper being an important instrument in the cause of conservation. For proof of that, we do not need to go back to the days of Richard Jefferies, who wrote about the gamekeeper in the late Victorian period, because in the 1970s and 1980s Barry Hines wrote about a gamekeeper whose life was set in or close to my constituency.

I recognise that the gamekeeper can play a significant part. I sometimes wonder and worry a little about the new breed of gamekeeper who may not live and work full time in the countryside and who sees his job as taking quick forays into the countryside to kill off vermin or creatures that may threaten the modern syndicate of shooters. I prefer the traditional gamekeeper, who lived in the area that he served, who knew virtually every square inch of the ground and who could certainly make a significant contribution. The Bill will at least allow the responsible gamekeeper the opportunity to say to the irresponsible employer who may want bigger and bigger bags that he cannot act as ruthlessly as perhaps a small minority of shooting people may require.

[Mr. Hardy]

I hope that the Bill will mean not only the cessation of the use of poisons—far too much poison is used in rural England—but will consign the pole trap to the museum. It may take longer than two months, as the Bill propses—I recall that the gin trap was used to catch badgers in South Yorkshire more than 10 years after it was made unlawful by the House. One hopes that such a long period will not elapse with the pole trap and that those that are not destroyed will be presented to countryside museums.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the gin trap. We all agree that it was a particularly unpleasant trap. Will he comment on the fen trap, which is used by warreners and people who want to control vermin? I assume that he would not want to ban that trap because if it is used properly, it is a humane trap.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. We seem to be wandering wide of the Lords amendments.

Mr. Hardy: It may be the only time that I shall get this opportunity, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

10.15 am

It was a coincidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), another south Wales colleague and friend, was drawn in the same ballot as Donald Coleman. I am glad that he is here because he was another friend of Donald. My hon. Friend took Donald's place on the Council of Europe, where Donald made such a considerable contribution.

I trust that the House will accept the Lords amendments, not because we enthuse about them, but because if we do not do so, the Bill will not reach the statute book. It is important that the measure should succeed.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I welcome any Bill that protects wildlife and the countryside. It has the support of the House; it would not have got this far without it.

The gamekeeper who is interested in and understands his job will be the best possible agent for conservation. He will certainly never misuse the powerful weapons that are now available in the form of toxic chemicals and would use them only responsibly and legally.

The Bill is a pretty modest measure. Its effect is to bring a wider section of the community into the net. In other words, employers, landowners or farmers will be prosecuted if one of their employees carries out an illegal act. However, that illegal act is already enshrined in the original legislation.

I welcome the Bill. I believe that it will sharpen employment procedures where they might be lax and that employers will double-check with their staff. However, I suggest that those who are hell-bent on breaking the law are likely, in the secrecy and privacy of the coutryside, to continue to do so. I therefore cannot forecast a substantial change in the protection of certain species.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I share the sentiments that my hon. Friend expressed in his last statement. Those who break the law are a small minority of landowners and those who own sporting rights. The Bill, although it has a limited use, is likely to affect those who are determined to break the law. However, it will certainly sharpen the interest that landowners take in the activities of their gamekeepers. In the extreme cases that we have seen, mostly in the wilder parts of the country, it is unlikely that the Bill will make a significant difference.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House again that this is not Second Reading. We are dealing with the Lords amendments and the debate must be restricted to them.

Mr. Wiggin: How right you are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to remind us of that as I was just about to refer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who moved the amendments and then spent a persuasive half hour telling us why they were wholly unacceptable. I am sure that when you come to decide on the difficult issue of the voice and the vote being the same, you will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Ron Davies: I cannot let that comment go unchallenged. If the hon. Gentleman takes the trouble to read the record, it will be clear to him that I accept the Lords amendments. I pressed the Minister for clarification of their consequences and implications, but I made it clear that I supported the amendments.

Mr. Wiggin: I am not going to spend next week reading *Hansard*. I heard clearly what the hon. Gentleman said, as I am sure you did, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The issue is whether the amendments are sensible and acceptable. I agreed with most of what the hon. Member for Caerphilly said. The provisions of the amendments were not in the Bill in the first instance, they are not required and they are entirely pedantic. If the legislation is good and if it has the approval of the House and of another place—it has that approval—there is no reason to delay putting the Bill into effect.

I believe, and have done for many years, that the principle of retrospective legislation is bad and leads to muddle. The public expect laws to have a starting date that they understand. They do not expect to be accused of doing something illegal which was at one time legal but was made illegal retrospectively. I entirely agree with the principle behind the amendments, but I do not understand why it is necessary to write it into the Bill. If prosecutions were contemplated or pending on activities that took place before Royal Assent was given, I should have thought that it was a perfectly good defence to say that what one did was legal at the time. I am not keen on the amendments, but we shall see how the debate proceeds.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Bill is very welcome. I, like other hon. Members, am grateful to the late Donald Coleman for having introduced it. My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) is a sponsor of the Bill and he knew Donald Coleman very well. They always encouraged each other's efforts in the interests of Wales and of the Welsh rural community. This is an all-party Bill, as it is sponsored by hon. Members from Plaid Cymru, the Labour party, the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats, and that also makes it commendable.

The amendments are of marginal importance. If we are to accept the first amendment—and I shall not oppose it—I endorse the call from the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) that, in addition to using the space provided by that amendment to publicise the Bill, we use the space

to publicise the proposed pesticides amnesty. That is logical. If the rural and farming community is to be targeted for information about changes in the legislation, let us use the time provided by the amendment wisely. That the delay is a two-month delay is of marginal importance, but if there is to be such a delay, I hope that it will not mean that more offences will be committed in that time.

On the second amendment, the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) made a valid——

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The hon. Gentleman wonders whether more offences will be committed during those two months. If the acts are already illegal and if gamekeepers are already breaking the law and rightly liable to punishment if they take the course mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, the only difference would be that during the two months, even if the landowner or the employer knew that such acts were being committed, he could not be prosecuted under this Bill. I shall have something to say in a moment about whether he could be prosecuted anyway.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is a matter of extending the remit of the legislation to cover those who are aware of what is happening as opposed to those who are the activists or the direct cause of the activity. That is why I said that the amendments provide a marginal extension. Nevertheless, one hopes that people will not take advantage of the delay in the new, tougher legislation.

I agree with the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare that retrospective legislation is a bad principle. I say that as a legislator and as a lawyer. The second amendment is merely a matter of clarification. When interpreted, the law does not have retrospective intention, so the amendments are merely for the avoidance of doubt. It is extremely doubtful, therefore, whether they are necessary.

Mr. Arbuthnot: As a lawyer and a legislator, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a bad principle to introduce otiose words into legislation?

Mr. Hughes: If one were to judge which was the worse principle, I think that it would probably be retrospective legislation, but otiose wording in legislation is something we could well do without. For people who are not legislators or lawyers, one of the problems of legislation is that it contains far too many words that they cannot understand, and far too many cross-references that they cannot find without days and days of research.

Therefore, I should prefer the second amendment not to be accepted but if it is, it should be nothing but a confirmation. I hope that all of us who sound so pietistic remember our views on retrospective legislation on other occasions. We are all under pressure—I do not say this in a party political way—to give in, especially when Government decide legislate retrospectively.

I endorse what the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) said. It is precisely the concern about species such as the red kite which has motivated such legislation. One of the best weeks that I have ever spent was in west Wales, a part of the country which I know well, having been brought up in south Wales. I spent two days in the hills of west Wales doing nothing but observing the red kite. The rarity and beauty of such species add enormously to the richness of Britain. We are wonderfully endowed with a variety of species, many of which are scarce. There are very few red kites—I believe that there are about 50 or 100 pairs, but certainly not many more. I understand that all of them are now in west Wales. We must ensure that we do all that we can to protect endangered species, whether they be birds or otherwise. The Bill is a step in that direction.

Mr. Wiggin: The kite became extinct in Wales; the current birds were imported from Spain and were introduced deliberately into the countryside.

Mr. Hughes: I think that the hon. Gentleman is right, and I believe that the red kites in Wales are the only red kites in the United Kingdom. There are only between 50 and 100 pairs, or that was certainly the case when I last checked. Other species may have been introduced into Britain which are not natives of this country and some of which we may not be too happy to have, but as stewards we have a duty to protect the more rare and beautiful ones, as they are here.

I wish the legislation well. The amendments are marginal, and no doubt we can dispose of them and move on to what may be more controversial business.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I must declare an interest as a landowner, a sportsman and the chairman of the British Field Sports Society. I have a keen interest in the proceedings of this Bill and of others that have a bearing on any sports followed today. I endorse what the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said about the activities of those who break the law and slaughter protected species unlawfully. That is extremely damaging to sporting interests and, clearly, nothing does us more harm in the public's eyes than to be seen behaving in such a way. We all tend to be tainted with the same brush, so I welcome the Bill, now promoted by the hon. Member for Caerphilly following the death of Donald Coleman, and I hope that it will be successful.

I hope that the Bill will not only pass through the House, but that it will, as the hon. Member for Caerphilly hopes, curtail the activities of those who break the law. I put my reservations about that when I intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin).

I was puzzled by the speech of the hon. Member for Caerphilly because, while the meaning of words is in the ear of the listener, I did not have the same impression as my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare about what the hon. Gentleman said. I do not think that he said that the amendments were unnecessary, but he was slightly muddled. He said that he did not especially welcome the amendments and that they had nothing to do with him, but he went on to make an impassioned and rather good defence of them, especially Lords amendment No. 1 which deals with the two-month amnesty. I am not sure what he really feels about that.

10.30 am

Mr. Ron Davies: I will make it clear. I do not expect that the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) will spend all next week reading today's *Hansard*—nor will his hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin). However, if he can find two minutes to read what I said, he will see that I said that this was a matter of political reality. Although I am paraphrasing now, I said that no private Member's legislation would reach the statute book without the support or the acquiescence of the Government. They insisted on the amendments. It is not possible for me to stop the amendments and, because I want the Bill on the statute book, I must accept them.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: That is exactly what I heard the hon. Gentleman say, so I do not need to refer to *Hansard*. He also extolled at length the virtues of and need for such an amnesty. We welcomed the fact that people would destroy the pesticides in their possession that could be used for unlawful purposes—even though holding them is not an unlawful act. I am not clear whether the hon. Gentleman wants the amendment or whether he supports it only because it has been thrust upon him.

Mr. Ron Davies: I pointed out the inconsistency of approach between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. When the amendment was discussed, the spokesman for the Department of the Environment in the Lords said that an amnesty for unauthorised pesticides was unnecessary. Two days later the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food produced a consultative document proposing the very thing that the Department of the Environment had said was unnecessary. I did not make an impassioned plea, but I said that if we were to have the amendment and an amnesty, then for goodness' sake the two Departments should get their act together and ensure that their opinions coincided.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I heard the hon. Gentleman rightly say that the two Ministers in the respective Departments did not seem to have quite the same view on the need for the amendment at that stage. No doubt they have reconciled their differences, which is why we are discussing the matter today. I still do not think that the hon. Gentleman has answered my question because I am no clearer about how he feels, as opposed to how my hon. Friends on the Front Bench feel—but never mind. As he rightly says, the provision will go into the Bill because that is probably the only way in which the Bill can be taken through successfully.

I welcome the amnesty. It will help because people will, I hope, dispose of any such substances to ensure that their keepers do not misuse them. When a law imposes a substantial new duty of care, people should have time to appreciate what is happening and to adjust accordingly. That is especially so for this Bill as it concerns substances that they are perfectly entitled to hold. Sometimes we imagine that the whole nation is listening breathlessly to every word that we say in the House and that every law that we pass is imprinted on their memory, but that is not the case. I am sure that it will be some time before the news about the activities that have been made unlawful in the Bill filters through to some of my fellow landowners in the Outer Hebrides. Where such duties are imposed, it is right for there to be a period during which the information can be disseminated and people can be made aware of their new duties.

Lords amendment No. 2 deals with retrospective legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and I are lawyers. I deplore retrospective legislation. No reputable legislator should consider it. I hope that my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, especially those who are Treasury Ministers, will take those words to heart. I note that there is a clause in the Finance Bill with which I do not agree as it is retrospective in its effect on building societies. I use that example to illustrate the fact that retrospective legislation can be introduced. It has been introduced on numerous occasions by the Labour party when in government, and, I am sorry to say, sometimes by my own Ministers. No lawyer likes retrospective legislation. No one should find that their lawful acts become unlawful. Another example that springs to mind is the legislation about war criminals, on which we disagreed with the other place. We insisted that activities that were not punishable under English law should now be punishable under English law 50 years later. A more substantial retrospective change would be hard to find. I said at the time, and I say again, that such legislation is deplorable. It is important that when there is any doubt, it is made clear in the legislation that what we are doing is not retrospective.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Although I entirely agree in principle with what my hon. Friend has said, the effect of what he has said is that the burden of these illegal acts will, for the next two months, fall on the gamekeepers and the little men, rather than on the people who order them to do those acts. We must also consider that.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Yes, but that has always been the case. That liability is not new. It has existed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. For the next two months the liability for these actions will lie with those who do them, irrespective of whether they have been ordered to do them, or whether their employer condones the action. I take my hon. Friend's point that the sooner we can make the law effective against landowners who order their keepers to commit an unlawful act, the better. However, landowners who have been faintly aware that their keepers are up to mischief, but have not pursued them with the vigour that we should like to see should not be retrospectively put at risk. It is the principle, rather than any particular instance of how the Act might be brought into effect, that we should consider when we are legislating.

No one likes otiose legislation or otiose words in legislation. I do not think that anyone would disagree with that. I am not clear whether the Act could be retrospective without those words. I must confess that I have not looked in sufficient detail at the 1981 Act to see whether that might be the case. We are not introducing new legislation, but amending existing legislation. I do not know whether, if the Bill is passed as an amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, what is now made unlawful under that Act would have been unlawful prior to the date of the Bill being implemented. If there is any risk of that, I am sure that we are right to take this action.

I question the amendment and the Bill in one way. Perhaps the hon. Member for Caerphilly, a fellow lawyer, or the Minister can enlighten me. I should have thought that anyone who ordered his gamekeeper to commit an unlawful act would be guilty of conspiracy to undertake that act. If I am right, the law could be used against them in any event and I am not sure that the Bill will add anything to the powers that already exist with regard to landowners who order their keepers to act in that way. The entire Bill may be otiose. Perhaps someone will enlighten me. If I am right, the law of conspiracy would carry substantially greater penalties than the Bill. Those with the task of enforcing the law should carefully consider whether to proceed under the law of conspiracy or under the Bill when they have evidence that someone has behaved in that fashion.

I welcome measures for the preservation of all species of wildlife. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)

and I sometimes disagree about the balance of that preservation but not about its purpose or end, which is to preserve all these species. I do not believe, however, that the Bill will have a substantial effect on the safety of the red kite in Wales. Lord McIntosh said that 52 breeding sites are defended by Gurkhas, so anyone who went near those sites would take his life in his hands. The protection given by the Gurkhas is much more effective than any protection that we will provide under the Bill.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I wish to answer my hon. Friend's conspiracy point. If a gamekeeper does something illegal, not because he is ordered to do so but because he is permitted to do so by his boss, it will be a little difficult to convict the landowner of conspiracy merely because he knew that something was happening and permitted it.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I am sure that that is correct. There will be occasions when the Bill adds strength to the position of the law enforcer. My comments on which of the two ways forward is more appropriate would, therefore, still apply, but only where the landowner had ordered his gamekeeper to do something illegal. I am sure that every hon. Member deplores such activities. I can think of nothing more despicable than a person ordering someone else to do something unlawful, when that person has no power to refuse because refusal would lead to dismissal, thus putting him in danger of being imprisoned if caught.

I welcome the Bill in so far as it goes. It will help curtail the activities of such people. In that spirit, I am sure that we will be successful in passing the Bill.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): It may be true that the public do not read *Hansard* as avidly as some of us may assume, but those who read today's *Hansard* will be impressed by the fact that the House has been debating these two amendments for more than an hour—longer than the total time given to Second Reading and the Committee stage.

I am glad to have joined the proceedings at this stage. I am new to the Bill. I am here because my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) cannot attend. The fact that I am new to the Bill does not mean that I am less enthusiastic than my hon. Friend. The House is aware that the Government support the Bill wholeheartedly.

As others said, it is sad that the original promotor of the Bill, Donald Coleman, was not able to take it forward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on the way in which he picked up the Bill and on his helpful and constructive approach during earlier stages. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), I felt that the hon. Gentleman moved the amendment a little grudgingly. In the end, he said that he supported it, but he showed a less gracious approach than we enjoyed earlier in the proceedings.

The speech of the hon. Member for Caerphilly contrasted with the eloquent contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). We have in the House a diminishing number of what we could call the gamekeeper-employing classes, but I felt that my hon. Friend was the authentic voice of that group——

Sir Charles Morrison: I am not one of them.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend says that he is not one of them. Nevertheless, I thought that the tone was there.

The Government share the concern that has been expressed by everyone who has taken part in the debate about the illegal killing of wild birds and animals. The Bill makes it an offence for a person to cause or permit another to contravene the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which prohibit the use of certain means of killing or taking wild birds or animals. People who manage or oversee land would become responsible for ensuring that they or their employees do not use unlawful means to kill wildlife.

10.45 am

The two amendments are minor and technical. They would bring the Bill more closely into line with similar provisions in other legislation on the creation of new offences. The first amendment would ensure that the Bill does not come into force until two months after the day it is enacted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) pointed out, this is a normal measure. There is nothing sinister about it. Where a new offence has been created, it is customary to allow that delay. As my hon. Friend said, it has merit for landowners all over Britain, even those in distant parts of the country, such as the Outer Hebrides—not that my hon. Friend or I wish to suggest that they are more disposed to break the law than those closer to the Palace of Westminster. The amendment allows for a period in which publicity can be given to and information can be disseminated about the existence of this new offence. It is right, therefore, that the Bill should follow the customary practice in legislation that creates new offences.

When the Bill was considered in another place, it was suggested that there should be an amnesty period to enable people to withdraw unwanted stocks of pesticides. The hon. Member for Caerphilly made that point. The Bill does not change the law relating to the holding and storing of pesticides. It was made clear in another place that we do not consider that there is any need in the Bill for an amnesty. There are ways and means of disposing of unwanted pesticides. Anyone who wishes to find out how to dispose of these substances safely should contact the waste disposal department of the relevant local authority. The two-month period after enactment of the Bill would enable landowners to reassess their position and that of their employees before the landowners become liable for their employees' actions.

There has been some confusion—certainly in the mind of the hon. Member for Caerphilly and possibly in the minds of other hon. Members—about the proposals of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Rather elaborately, the hon. Member for Caerphilly tried to construct an image of disagreement and of lack of communication between my Department and MAFF. I assure him that there is no difference between us.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly referred to proposals for an industry-run scheme to enable farmers to dispose of unapproved and unwanted pesticides. He suggested that the advice given by the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in another place did not square with those proposals. There is not really a problem. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who seems to have left his place temporarily, understood the position more clearly. The Ministry has issued for consultation a draft approval and consent under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986, which are intended to assist in the safe disposal of pesticides. They would enable, subject to strict

conditions, the transfer of currently unapproved pesticides from farms to commercial stores and their storage in those stores before safe disposal. They would allow that to take place within the law.

The sale and use of such pesticides are not being legalised; nor is their on-farm storage. I stress that it is already illegal to store unapproved pesticides. The MAFF proposals do not represent an amnesty of any kind for farmers who possess stocks of such substances. The proposal simply assists with the operation of an industry-run scheme. It is essentially a practical arrangement. There should be no linkage between the two-month gap that we propose—between the date of Royal Assent and the date when the Bill's provisions become effective—and the proposed period when farmers will be able to transfer unapproved pesticides. Those periods may overlap, but there is no direct relationship between the two.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is there an end date for the period during which farmers can get rid of unapproved pesticides? Surely after that, if they have them, they will have to do something with them, and getting rid of them would seem to be the most sensible and beneficial course.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right. The Ministry is allowing the two-month period during which farmers can dispose of unapproved pesticides and I suspect that farmers who fail to take advantage of that special opportunity will be more likely to encounter prosecution, especially given that it is already an offence—and it will remain an offence—even to hold unapproved pesticides.

Mr. Ron Davies: Let me help the Minister. The proposed consent will expire on 31 December. The hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) asked whether it was time-limited and I confirm that it is.

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman is right: the consent is time-limited.

The Bill strengthens the 1981 Act by bringing it into line with equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland and with other legislation controlling, among other things, the sale, storage and use of pesticides. It will therefore make a useful addition to the existing stringent controls over the killing of wildlife, especially birds of prey.

Fears were expressed in the other place that there might be an increase in the number of illegal poisoning incidents in the period before the Act became operative. I emphasise that the 1981 Act already makes it an offence to use illegal methods to kill wildlife, and there are heavy penalties for those convicted of breaking the Act's stringent provisions. The Bill does not change the law in that respect and no one should doubt that appropriate action will be taken to deal with people who are prepared to use cruel or indiscriminate methods to kill birds and animals that do no harm.

My Department is participating in a major long-term publicity campaign with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food against the illegal poisoning of wildlife and we are supporting the campaign with a range of publicity to encourage people to use pesticides properly, to control predators by legal methods and to report illegal poisoning methods. Anyone suspecting pesticide poisoning of wildlife or, for that matter, domestic pets, should immediately contact the police or the local office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Ministry has an established system for investigating deaths of wildlife which may be due to pesticide poisoning. That system includes field inquiries to assess the circumstances and collect any bait and carcases. A post-mortem is carried out to rule out other causes of death such as injury or disease and a chemical analysis identifies the type and quantity of pesticide present. Where the circumstances point to illegal poisoning, evidence is prepared for a possible prosecution. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare will encourage his constituents to be vigilant and to watch out for cases where there may have been illegal poisoning of wildlife.

We shall continue to work with our colleagues at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and with other Departments in reviewing any pesticides widely implicated in poisoning incidents to see whether tighter controls over those substances are needed.

It is opportune that the publicity campaign is running in parallel with the passage of the Bill, because it helps to reinforce the message that we are not prepared to tolerate these illegal practices. We know that farmers and other land managers need to control predators, but they must use proper lawful means that do not threaten wildlife, especially protected species. The general public can also help by using garden and other pesticides carefully and safely.

In the report issued in April by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Nature Conservancy Council, it was reported that hundreds of birds, including many specially protected species, have been poisoned, shot, trapped and killed illegally throughout the United Kingdom in the past 10 years. The report showed that illegal persecution had caused the deaths of 40 golden eagles, 65 peregrine falcons, 57 hen harriers, 24 red kites and 367 buzzards between 1979 and 1989. Many more deaths probably went unrecorded. The Government's response to the 25 recommendations made in that report will be published shortly.

Lords amendment No. 2 would prevent the provisions of the Bill, when enacted, from operating retrospectively. That seems to cause hon. Members a certain amount of concern. The position is simply that anything done before the Bill's enactment would not be an offence, and only those actions taking place after the Bill is enacted would be caught by the provisions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes pointed out, the House and the Government are, rightly, extremely reluctant to contemplate retrospective legislation of any sort. Wherever possible, we set our faces firmly against it and the amendment merely confirms the position. Legislation that seeks to create new offences generally contains such an exception. It is neither reasonable nor equitable that a person should be put at risk of subsequent prosecution as a result of actions that were not in breach of the law at the time when they were carried out. We see no good reason why the Bill should not include such a provision. I assure hon. Members that the amendment does not represent any weakening of our support for the principles of the Bill, but we do not think it right that those who in the past may not have taken positive steps to ensure that illegal methods of killing wildlife were not used by others under their control should now unwittingly be made liable for such offences themselves.

We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to take great care of our wildlife to preserve its abundance and

diversity. In the 1981 Act, we have one of the best systems in the world to ensure that comprehensive and effective procedures are in place for protecting the species and their habitats, but unfortunately there are those who, by thoughtless or ill-considered actions, undermine those procedures by acting outside the law and ignoring the wishes of the vast majority of the British people to preserve our natural heritage.

The Bill has identified a chink in our armour which it is right that we should close. It will help to bring home to people who use or permit the use of illegal methods to kill wildlife the fact that we are prepared to do everything possible to meet our objectives for the protection of our natural heritage, especially endangered species. We must stamp out illegal practices which cause so much unnecessary suffering to our wildlife and the death of species that do no harm. The Government fully support the amendments.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendment agreed to.

Badgers Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF S.2 OF BADGERS ACT 1973

Lords amendment: No. 1, in line 27, leave out "have been reasonably" and insert "reasonably have been".

10.35 am

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): I beg to move, that this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment is purely technical.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I will not detain the House, but I could not help noticing that there was a split infinitive in the clause, so I welcome the amendment. We ought to ensure that legislation that goes through the House conforms with the highest educational standards, which the Government are considering carefully at the moment. I look forward to the day when the grammar of all our citizens has improved sufficiently to make it unnecessary to introduce such amendments at such a late stage in our proceedings.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): It would be a pity if the opportunity were lost to congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on the skill with which he has piloted the Bill through the House. I hope that all hon. Members will join me in doing so.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3

EXTENSION OF GENERAL EXCEPTIONS

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 2, line 3, leave out "(c)" and insert "(a), (c) or (e)".

Mr. Roy Hughes: I beg to move, that this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 8.

Mr. Hughes: The amendments deal with the stopping-up process, which is a rather controversial issue. Throughout our proceedings, my task has been to try to reconcile the various interests. I have had to be a bit of an acrobat at times. I do not know whether that qualifies me for the circus, but I hope that a good Bill will result from the efforts made on all sides. I am reliably informed that the present Bill is indeed a good Bill, although we do not achieve perfection in this world.

I am extremely grateful to Lord Houghton for the way in which he handled the amendments in the other place. Lord Elton was a distinguished Member of this House for many years and has become a legendary figure, not least for his efforts in animal welfare. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) has left the Chamber, because I wanted to pay tribute to his efforts with regard to the Bill. He was a very hard bargainer at times, but he was honest and straightforward, and I am deeply grateful to him.

The animal welfare organisations have assisted me at every stage of the Bill and I am deeply grateful to them. Support for the Bill has been widespread throughout the

[Mr. Hughes]

country. One animal welfare organisation told me that after Third Reading, it received more than 1,000 letters of support for the Bill. That gives some idea of the strength of feeling about the matter.

One particular gentleman who has been very helpful and supportive—and I will name-drop here—is Mr. Phil Drabble. He wrote and spoke to me——

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am most concerned that no Minister from the Foreign Office is present to make a statement about the situation in Yugoslavia. As the House will know, events there are still extremely unstable. There is the potential for probably the worst possible civil war imaginable. There have already been questions about the matter during Foreign Office questions, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has made a statement. However, events are obviously moving very quickly and many people are extremely concerned. I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why is there no Foreign Office Minister here at 11 am to make a statement about that absolutely crucial issue?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not aware of any request from a Minister for a statement on that serious matter, but I am sure what the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard by the Government Front-Bench spokesmen.

Mr. Arbuthnot: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Following the by-election in Liverpool, Walton yesterday, I understand that an announcement has been made that there is to be an inquiry by the Leader of the Opposition into membership of this House. Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, had a request from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to make a statement about the allocation of Opposition days, because I understand that there is to be a split between the Militant party in the House and the Labour party? Has there been any request from the Leader of the House to make a statement to you?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There has been no request for a statement. May we now return to badgers?

Mr. Roy Hughes: The last time that we discussed the Badgers Bill in the House, there were interruptions caused by the Gulf crisis.

I hope that the Bill will receive its Royal Assent. It will protect those wonderful creatures and their setts. I look forward to its implementation in three months or so.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on the way in which he has conducted the negotiations on the Bill. I am grateful to him for his comments about my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). He would have appreciated those comments, but sadly he has been called away from the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Newport, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes have worked extremely hard to achieve today's compromise. I appreciate that those who feel strongly about the protection of badgers and who wanted to see the Bill passed in its original form may feel that it is less than what they set out to achieve. On the other hand, those of us who represent country interests and country sports also have strong views about the effect of the Bill on the activities of sportsmen, conservationists, farmers and those who have to live in the countryside.

I believe that the compromise will satisfy all parties. It will strengthen the hand of the law enforcer against those despicable people who take badgers for baiting. We were all united on that purpose. I welcome the fact that the Bill has reached the point where I am sure that we will be able to accept it. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make that point. It was important to put it on the record, although I appreciate that it was not strictly in order as we are considering a small group of Lords amendments.

The amendments are mostly concerned with stopping and the need of those who hunt foxes to stop up badger setts to prevent foxes from entering them. We had long debates and discussions about the best way to achieve that to the maximum advantage of the badger and the fox hunter to ensure that fox hunters and farmers—particularly in Wales—can control foxes. The hon. Member for Newport, East is extremely sympathetic to the needs of Welsh farmers who would have found it almost impossible to control foxes which ravaged flocks of lambs had the Bill not been amended in this way. I welcome the fact that earths can be stopped in the way set out in clause 3, as amended.

I want to explain how we arrived at amendment No. 5, which allows earth stopping to be carried out the night before the day of a hunt. It was originally suggested that stopping should be carried out on the day of the hunt. I know that the hon. Member for Newport, East was a little aggrieved that the amendment was included when it did not appear to have been fully discussed and agreed. I offer him our apologies for that. I can assure him that that was not intended. Lord Mancroft had discussed the matter with Lord Houghton and they appeared to reach an agreement, which unfortunately did not hold.

None the less, I assure the hon. Gentleman that that will not inhibit the value of his Bill. I am sure that it will not make it any more difficult to control badger baiters and those who unlawfully dig for badgers and attempt to get at them for unlawful purposes. Having been amended in this way, the Bill will be invaluable for the proper practice of earth stopping.

As the House will be aware, roughly speaking, the Bill now states that earths can be stopped on the day of the hunt with bundles of twigs and they can be stopped the night before using loose material—usually a loose filling of earth. That is a very sensible agreement. If twigs and sticks had been used to stop an earth the night before, the badger would not have been able to move them, and it might have been stuck for rather longer than anyone would want to see it stuck in the event of the earth being occupied, or if it was out and wanted to return home. As loose earth is to be used, and as badgers are extremely formidable diggers, I am sure that, if a badger is caught by earth stopping that has been properly carried out the night before, it will be able to dig itself out.

In the countryside, as a result of changing ways, there is a substantial shortage of people who are experienced in earth stopping and are prepared to stop earths for a hunt. Therefore, there would have been an enormous strain on the resources of a hunt had the time limit for stopping remained the day of the hunt. It would have been too much to ask one or two earth stoppers to stop all the earths and setts during that time. Under such a time limit, stopping

could not have been carried out properly. It was therefore very important that an amendment was included in the Bill to ensure that the earth stopper can fill the entrances to the earths and setts as necessary, and that that is done properly. That is as important for the animal as it is for the earth stopper.

I very much welcome clause 3, as amended. It will fulfil the purposes of those who introduced the Bill and those of us who sought to adjust it to the needs of those living in the countryside. I welcome the Lords amendments.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for his efforts. In the last Session of this Parliament, I tried to be the kind of go-between that the hon. Gentleman has found himself having more time-consumingly to be: I remember the almost extraordinary scenes when I tried to negotiate a compromise form of wording for the badgers legislation then introduced by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). Upstairs in Committee, manuscript amendments were whistling about the Committee Room to and from advisers and civil servants. Any hon. Member trespassing with the intention of legislating on this matter knew in advance that he or she was entering what might be called a countryside minefield. The prospect of the Bill emerging unscathed is therefore extremely welcome.

I have three comments about the different amendments in the group. First, it is perfectly proper to debate the definition of the sorts of material that can be used temporarily to stop sett entrances to prevent foxes from entering them during hunts. Amendment No. 4 changes the terminology from "clean loose" to "untainted", which seems generally acceptable.

My second point is more controversial. The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) said that amendment No. 5 had been the subject of some sort of ambush in the other place—I do not mean that pejoratively. The amendment was tabled at a late stage to change the deadline for the stopping up from the day of the hunt in question to the middle of the day preceding the day of the hunt. I know that that caused some people some concern, because it obviously extends the period during which the sett is unavailable to the badger and can be interfered with in other ways. It would have been better if we could have introduced provisions to apply only on the day of the hunt. We shall have to watch the way in which the provisions are implemented, to ensure that there is no abuse.

I can understand the logic of saying that if those of us who are legislators accept the principle of stopping up in connection with fox hunting, it is better to do that on the day before the hunt, rather than risk it being done early on the morning of the hunt, because stopping up that is carried out in haste in the morning might be worse and more destructive for the sett than work that is carried out more carefully on the day before. On behalf of those who are keen to give the maximum protection to setts, I stress that our acceptance of that logic is not to be taken as a sign that we are giving people a licence to do anything other than the law permits.

My third point relates to who has the authority over that activity. Amendment No. 7 expands the definition of those who have that authority from the current definition given in clause 3, which refers to

"the person is so doing with the consent of the landowner and is authorised by a Hunt recognised by the Masters of Fox Hounds Association who shall keep a register of all such persons."

The amendment broadens that definition to include those who are recognised by the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles or the Central Committee of Fell Packs. That is to ensure that, in different parts of the country, other categories of people can be included on the register.

I turn now to a point that we debated last year, both in Committee and in the Chamber, and which we have debated again this year. I refer to the principle that a responsible public body, which is recognised by everybody, should keep the register. That would ensure accountability, and nobody could then say, "I have been given permission to do that," without there being some provision for tracking that person's identity and authority. It is important that all stopping-up activities can be checked and authorised.

Finally, this is the second private Member's Bill that we have considered this morning and, like the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill, the Badgers Bill is welcome. However, it is an anomaly of the British administrative system that different Ministers are responsible for those two Bills. Naturally, I welcome the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd) to the Treasury Bench. However, when we discussed the Wildlife and Countryside Bill, the relevant Department was the Department of the Environment. Having moved to a discussion of badgers, which one might think is equally a matter relating to wildlife and the countryside, we find that a Home Office Minister is put in charge. That suggests that there might be scope for a little reform in the definition of ministerial responsibilities.

My party certainly thinks that that is needed, and I hope that the Government will contemplate that before the next election. Perhaps the Tory manifesto—and equally the Labour manifesto—might suggest linking animal and natural issues in one Department. To be honest, I do not think that the Home Office would mind geting rid of its responsibility for animals, as they have caused it a fair amount of trouble in recent months.

11.15 am

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I begin by apologising to the House. As a result of leaving the Chamber for a few minutes to attend an important meeting outside, I regret that I did not realise that the debate on the second group of amendments had begun, so I am afraid that I speak having committed a discourtesy to those hon. Members who have already spoken.

My comments about this group of amendments reflect the core of my reservations about the Bill and its predecessors. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on having brought his Bill so far. I know only too well the difficulties of getting a private Member's Bill on to the statute book and I very much welcome his Bill.

Like all my colleagues, over the years I have received a good deal of correspondence from constituents who have been keen to do something to assist the cause of badgers. I have always warmly supported that cause, but with one

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

reservation which I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman. Nevertheless, as I said, I am delighted that the Bill will soon be on the statute book.

Before turning to the points that cause me particular concern, I must advise the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that he is not alone in being mystified by the intricacies of ministerial responsibilities for matters relating to animals, wildlife and the countryside. When I served at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for a time I was the Minister with responsibility for dogs. It was during that period that the Department gave up its responsibility for dogs—with a good deal of relief. I have a suspicion that in the four years since I have left the Department, my two successors have breathed a great sigh of relief that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food no longer deals with dogs and that that responsibility has been passed to the Home Office which, I am sure, is much better able to deal with it. That is certainly the argument that I used at the time.

My great reservation about the Bill is that not only is it trying to help badgers, which I am sure is what we all want, but at the same time it does not want the control of foxes in certain parts of the country, such as my constituency, to be made more difficult. My constituency contains most of the southern parts of the English Lake district—I think that it is the most beautiful part of the British Isles. People visit it to enjoy its wonderful scenery and amenities. One of the things that they like to see are the sheep grazing on the fells and mountains. Not enough people realise that if it were not for a continual, hard and tough policy of controlling foxes on those fells and mountains, sheep farming would be almost impossible there. The hon. Member for Newport, East knows Wales well and will be aware that the successful farming of sheep on mountainous land depends entirely on controlling foxes which can cause the most dreadful, savage and cruel depradations in the spring. It is almost entirely because of the need to protect sheep on the fells—lambs especially—from foxes that we have fell packs. They carry out the essential job of controlling foxes and making sheep farming possible.

If I were to launch into a dissertation on the current problems of sheep farming on the fells, you might say to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was out of order. That being so, I shall merely say that sheep farming in mountainous areas has never been more difficult in my lifetime, despite the literally hundreds of millions of pounds being poured by the European Community and by the Government into the support of upland farms.

Only two weeks ago I had the great pleasure of attending a meeting that was organised by National Trust tenants in Great Langdale in my constituency. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was kind enough to attend, and she made an excellent speech. It was obvious, however, that great difficulties were being experienced in controlling foxes.

The hon. Member for Newport, East knows that I am concerned that controlling badgers under the welcome provisions of the Bill might mean that controlling foxes in upland areas will become a good deal more difficult. That brings me to Lords amendment No. 7. I am delighted that the amendment, if agreed to, will extend the provisions of the Bill as it stands to include the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles or the Central Committee of Fell Packs. I am not so concerned about harriers and beagles, although harrier packs in the Lake district—certainly the Lunesdale harriers—do an extremely helpful job in controlling foxes.

There is no following of footpacks by people on horses because the terrain in the area which I represent is much too difficult. There are footpacks throughout the Lake district and it is essential that the position of the Central Committee of Fell Packs is fully recognised in the Bill. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Newport, East has agreed to include the provisions of amendment No. 7 in the Bill.

I told the hon. Member for Newport, East a few moments ago that I would give him an example of the problem that is caused by foxes that comes from Wales. I remember being told about 30 years ago of a situation that arose during the second world war when the huntsman of a footpack in west Wales was called up for military service. The pack of hounds had to be dispersed. The rise in the fox population on the mountains in west Wales became so great, and their ravages of lambs so great, that they had a significant impact on the production of food. That was especially important during the war, when a large part of the nation's food was being delivered by convoys, which were being attacked all the time by U-boats.

I understand that it became almost impossible to pursue sheep farming on the mountains of west Wales. It became necessary to release the huntsman from the armed services so that he could resume his role and control the fox population and so allow the farming systems in the area to make their proper contribution to the production of food. That work was regarded as much more important than the work that he would have undertaken if he had remained in the Army. That is a clear example from west Wales of the essential need to control foxes. That can be done only by hunting, and the only way in which they can be hunted is by footpacks. As I said, there is no question of people following on horses.

The control of foxes is essential if we are to maintain the beauty of the uplands. If sheep farming were to be made impossible in upland areas, the first people to complain would be those who go to enjoy the beauty of areas such as the Lake district and the Welsh mountains.

I am extremely pleased that a good deal of care has gone into amending the Bill. I hope that it will not make it more difficult in any way for upland farmers to earn a living at a time of great economic difficulty. Despite massive subsidies, they are finding life extremely difficult. I thank the hon. Member for Newport, East for being big enough to include the amendments in the Bill, which I think is an infinitely better measure as a consequence.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I am delighted to be able to take up the remarks of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), although we have rather different views of foxes. I take the view that the fox is one of nature's entrepreneurs. It amazes me that Conservative Members, who have such fondness for the entrepreneur, should detest an entrepreneur in its natural form.

I shall not deny that the fox occasionally takes a sickly lamb, but the fox's role is more that of the scavenger of the dead lamb and the afterbirth than the taker of healthy lambs. The right hon. Gentleman may recall that, when the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr.

Carlile) was representing the Liberal Democrats at an earlier stage in the Bill's progress, he was as enthusiastic as Conservative Members about the need to control foxes. He listed and categorised the massive destruction of lambs and sheep in his constituency. I observed that the hon. and learned Gentleman had probably eaten more sheep than the foxes in his constituency.

In the debate in which the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery spoke, I made the suggestion—one or two Conservative Members seemed to approve of the idea—that it would be desirable to have a scientific appraisal of the effect of foxes upon the sheep and lamb population on these islands. There are sufficient experts in the public employ, whether in the Home Office or in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to carry out such a survey. I know that they would readily do so.

I should be interested to receive the results of such a survey, whichever way they went, for they would add to the body of desirable knowledge. A survey should assess whether the fox is as damaging to sheep farming and the interests of the sheep farmer as many suggest. I suspect that a useful excuse is being employed to justify hunting. I do not want to enter into the argument about fox hunting——

Mr. Jopling: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I do not agree with a word of it. I know that he spends quite a lot of time in the Lake district, and I suggest that he should contact some of the hunts. If he takes up that suggestion, he will find that it is quite a regular happening for farmers from one part of the Lake district to telephone a hunt secretary or huntsman and say, "We are losing an awful lot of lambs. Please bring the hunt over and see if you can reduce the number of foxes."

Mr. Hardy: I am aware of that. I am aware also that studies in some areas do not necessarily confirm the right hon. Gentleman's view. That is why I said in the earlier debate to which I referred that it would be desirable if a proper study were undertaken. I hope that the Minister will take note of my suggestion. I am not suggesting that what the right hon. Gentleman has described does not happen, but I think that the scale of the problem is debatable. Surely it is a jolly good idea to put the facts on the record.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsay (Mr. Hughes) suggested that a Minister should be made responsible for these matters. With privatisation and the transferring of responsibility to agencies, there is a good case for removing a large number of Ministers. Perhaps the Home Office Minister would care to act upon that suggestion, as any Minister undertaking that responsibility should not be included in that large number of Ministers who should be removed.

11.30 am

Mr. Simon Hughes: There is an argument, which has currency not just among my colleagues, that there should be an animal protection agency or something similar, charged with the statutory responsibility of looking after animals welfare. Perhaps that would save some Ministers some of their work, and some of the Government some of their embarrassment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) realises that it would not be appropriate to develop that argument while discussing this group of amendments.

Mr. Hardy: I would not wish to waste time on that argument, because I am not overly keen on agencies. I want Ministers to have responsibility. I hope that the Minister accepts that, within that responsibility, enlightenment and a proper factual assessment—which has been the subject of much debate—are desirable.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) is grateful for the tribute paid to him by the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). However, my hon. Friend did not exactly enthuse about the amendments; he accepted them out of political realism, because he knew that otherwise the Bill would not succeed. I agree with my hon. Friend's approach, but it is important that we make it clear that the amendments have not been greeted with great enthusiasm.

Lords amendment No. 7 refers to the keeping of a register. Over the past few years, the Government have spent a great deal of money ensuring that those in employment were not allowed to claim social security benefits. In South Yorkshire not long ago, a small army of snoopers spend a great deal of time observing beaters on a shoot. They were all unemployed people who were being gainfully employed on that day's shoot. I suspect that the masters of foxhounds may not be aware how, in certain rural areas, people seek to supplement their relatively low incomes.

Given the reduction in employment in rural areas, one or two of the folk employed as earth stoppers may be dependent upon social security income. I should hate to think that the hunts would be embarrassed when they discovered that they were accessories to an event that Conservative Members regard as far more serious than extensive tax evasion. Given the real enthusiasm of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale for the amendments, I thought it worth making that point. We shall see how matters unfold.

As I said, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East had no alternative but to accept the amendments. I hope—I am sure that Conservative Members also hope—that they will not so weaken the Bill that, in another two or three years, we will have to find yet another opportunity to add to the catalogue of efforts to ensure the protection of badgers.

It is a great pity that the 1973 Act, which I took through the House, was imperfect. I ensured as much protection for the badger as I could at that time, but the Act had a loophole that has been exploited by irresponsible, barbarous and evil people. I hope that this Bill will close the loophole and ensure that the protection of badgers is as comprehensive as all hon. Members want it to be.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said, and we all hope that the Bill will be effective. However, I caution him that we must, as in all matters, realise the limitations of what we can do in this House. We can legislate against murder, and most people will not commit that crime—but there will always be one or two people who will. I hope that we will not panic when one or two people slip through the net provided by this

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

Bill. There must be a balance between what we can effectively achieve and what must be left to the discretion of the public.

Mr. Hardy: I accept the hon. Gentleman's realistic view. Indeed, about 12 years ago I reminded the House that we could not station a police officer by every badger sett, by every endangered plant or by every bird's nest. That is why I was delighted when my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East paid tribute to the voluntary societies, which can help in the processes of education. That is just as important as legislation.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I came into the Chamber when I realised that the hon. Gentleman—who in other circumstances I call my friend—was speaking. All too often, the media pay attention to something that has gone wrong. The Bill is not as perfect as many of us would have wished, so I hope that the media will focus even on the one or two people who make mistakes that involve the death of these wonderful animals. I hope that the media will not be afraid of exposing them.

Mr. Hardy: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who has made an appropriate request. I am grateful for his remarks, just as I have long been grateful for his interest in the matter. I am sure that the Bill will make a significant contribution to the protection of badgers.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 4

Amendment of s. 9 of Badgers Act 1973

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 2, line 32, after ("1990") insert ("or, as respects Scotland, section 19(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972").

Mr. Roy Hughes: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment clarifies the Scottish position.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 10, in page 2, line 49, at end insert—

("(j) for the purpose of the preservation, or archaeological investigation, of a monument scheduled under section 1 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, to interfere with a badger sett within an area specified in the licence by any means so specified.")

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 11 to 15.

Mr. Roy Hughes: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment is an important provision that would ensure that archaeological sites are not endangered. I do not think that there is anything controversial about that.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I welcome the amendment, which is an important provision. It is especially important that there is a licensing system for people to stop badger setts for the purpose of controlling foxes. The system should be properly administered and licences should be made available in appropriate circumstances to appropriately qualified people.

The amendments, which were tabled jointly in the other place by the noble Lord Mancroft and my noble Friend Lord Houghton, clarify and improve the system under which licences may be issued permitting interference with badger setts for the purpose of controlling foxes. The amendments were a response to great concern expressed in another place that the licensing system should be sufficiently practical and sensible to ensure that fox control in upland areas could continue. Hon. Members will be aware that that concern is most relevant to sheep worrying in the upland areas. My noble Friend Lord Swinton moved an amendment which would have given a general licence to landowners, occupiers, and other authorised people to interfere with a badger sett in the spring for the purpose of controlling foxes. However, he withdrew it so that the compromise amendment No. 10 could be agreed, and I am delighted that it was.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the criteria by which licence applications are assessed and granted will be identical for England, Scotland and Wales?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I cannot, because that point is not one which I have considered, but so far as I am aware the criteria are the same. If the hon. Gentleman has any reason to doubt that, we had better discuss the point fairly rapidly, before the Bill progresses any further.

The Bill makes it an offence to enter a terrier into a badger sett. If foxes or rabbits occupy one part of a large sett and the other part is currently used by a badger, the sett will be protected and the foxes or rabbits may not be taken out with the use of a terrier. Similarly, if a fox that has taken lambs runs to ground in a live badger sett, it cannot be got out except under a licence from the Ministry of Agriculture or the equivalent authority in Scotland.

The Bill already makes provision to ensure that under section 9 of the Badger Act 1973, a licence may be granted to allow a person to interfere with a badger sett for the purpose of preventing serious damage to land, crops, poultry, or any other form of property. However, although livestock is property, wild game and other ground nesting birds are not—so that fox control to protect those birds which in any way interferes with a badger sett would be unlawful and could not be licensed unless the amendments were made.

The Ministry of Agriculture has not been required to issue licences in those circumstances until now because badger setts have not been protected. The licensing system was designed to meet rare situations where farmers wanted to remove a rogue badger, and not to deal with the thousands of farmers and keepers who need to control foxes in or near badger setts. I emphasise the word "near" because it is important that rabbits and foxes near badger setts can be controlled and that people do not put themselves at risk of prosecution because a badger sett is near the place where they are operating.

Although the definition of a badger sett is now much improved, considerable concern remains that persons involved in legitimate fox control would constantly run the risk of prosecution—especially if taking foxes out of places that badgers also occupy, or if badgers live nearby. Such persons would need a licence not so much to interfere with the sett directly but to enable them to operate at all.

Foxes and badgers are becoming more prolific, and although the Ministry of Agriculture indicated that it is

willing to review the issue of licences, it is clear that the only practicable way to ensure that legitimate fox control can continue is to amend the licensing procedure so that the grounds on which licences are issued are clear.

The amendments will allow the Ministry and its Scottish equivalent, or the Nature Conservancy Council, to issue a licence to permit a person, but not organisations, to interfere with a badger sett for the purpose of controlling foxes in order to protect livestock, game and wildlife. Without the amendments, licences would have to be applied for under the existing provisions in section 9. The condition of such a licence—to prevent serious damage to property—means that, in each case, the applicant would have to go to great lengths to show that foxes are causing serious damage to his lambs. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) queried the extent of that damage, but my hon. Friends and I are sure that lamb damage is done by foxes throughout the country.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): How will the Ministry or the Nature Conservancy Council establish the bona fides of licence applications? Will they simply take the word of the landowner, or will they make an on-site inspection themselves?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is a matter of concern to us all that those who are issued with licences are fit and proper persons to receive them. I will deal with that point later.

I had three lambs taken from the park around my house this spring, undoubtedly by foxes. We found the head of one lamb, but the carcase had been entirely removed. That is a feature of fox taking—it is not how dogs behave, or any other predator.

Mr. Tony Banks: Or one of the hon. Gentleman's hungry constituents.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: A hungry constituent would have to walk a few miles to reach the farm to which I am referring. In any event, I am sure that my constituents are extremely confident that the Government's economic policies will ensure that they do not go hungry.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) accepts that a fox sometimes takes a lamb, but that the extent of that damage is overstated. He made the point that he would welcome an inquiry to establish the true facts.

11.45 am

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I accept that that is what the hon. Member for Wentworth said, and I did not mean to misrepresent him. I merely stated that the hon. Gentleman queried the contention that lamb damage is a significant factor in the need for fox control.

It is all very well considering fox damage in relation to a big area and a large number of sheep, but it is usually a particular fox that is doing the damage in one area. It is of no comfort to the wretched farmer whose sheep are the target for that fox if 20 neighbouring farmers experience no such trouble. The killing of 20 or 30 lambs out of a population of 500 or 600, or of 2,000 or 3,000 may not be considered significant—but it is, if the losses are suffered by one farmer.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that foxes kill not only sheep but other animals—particularly birds such as geese? One of my constituents has an ornamental lake which provides a home for several species of extremely valuable geese—some of which are worth more than £200 apiece. This nesting season, nine separate geese on their nests were destroyed by foxes, one by one, with the result that only one goose managed to bring a litter on. Despite my constituent's best endeavours to secure the area against foxes, with the erection of fences and all sorts of other ingenious measures to prevent the foxes from gaining access, they managed to do so every time, causing a great amount of damage and financial loss.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend is right in saying that poultry in particular are a target for foxes, and it also needs to be emphasised that foxes are one of the animals that kill for fun. When they break into a poultry run, they not only take two or three chickens or geese to satisfy their hunger but kill as many as they can for the sheer joy and pleasure of doing so. The public are mistaken if they believe that foxes are poor little animals that only kill to feed themselves as necessary. Much of the killing done by foxes of lambs, poultry and other animals is for pleasure —and in much larger numbers than is necessary for survival.

A licence granted under the amendments would not permit the killing, injuring or taking of badgers, but the licensing authority is empowered to lay down any conditions as to how the sett may be interfered with, and must specify the area to which the licence applies. The key difference between the amendments under consideration and that of my noble Friend Lord Swinton is that they leave the issuing of licences to the discretion of the licensing authority, whereas my noble Friend's amendments would have made their issuing compulsory but set down conditions to ensure that badgers were not harmed and would have enabled licensing authority to refuse a licence to unsuitable people. Amendment No. 10 states that no licence issued under the Badgers Act 1973 shall be "unreasonably withheld or revoked".

Speaking for the Government on Report in another place, Lord Astor said that he expected that a condition of the licence would be that the person authorised should take reasonable care to avoid causing harm to a badger. The licence might also specify what may or may not be done to a badger sett—for example, the sett should not be destroyed and any accidental damage to it should be rectified as soon as possible. We all agree that badger setts should be fully protected from damage during these operations.

I accept that licences should specify that minimal damage be caused to setts and that the least possible disturbance be caused to badgers. But we should not make the conditions so restrictive or unrealistic as to make the job of fox control impossible. Inevitably fox control in badger setts will cause some disturbance, which is why a licence is necessary in the first place, but it does not harm badgers when undertaken responsibly. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) rightly said, it is essential that only the right people be issued with these licences and that the terms and conditions in them be fulfilled.

Fox control has not just been invented; it will happen in future, it is happening now, and it has happened for centuries. It always has been and it will remain an essential part of country life. Foxes and badgers are on the increase in upland areas and throughout large parts of the country.

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

They are not threatened species. There are many thousands of both types of animal in the countryside and I sincerely hope that they will continue to flourish. But it is a fact that both foxes and badgers—I emphasise the latter—thrive best in the best hunting conditions because the balance of nature is maintained by those with an interest in country sport and in the conservation of the countryside, who want to ensure that there is a good supply of wildlife but not in such quantities as to throw out of balance the other species in an area. That applies especially to foxes, but also to kites, eagles and buzzards. It is important that they be preserved but also that they do not grow to such numbers as might threaten other species. The role of the licence is important in the keeping of this balance.

It should be emphasised that licences are not necessarily sought to dig for foxes in what are obviously active badger setts, although that may be necessary. Licences are needed as much to ensure that legitimate people engaged in fox control are not prosecuted if, for instance, they enter terriers into a large area with badgers at one end and foxes or rabbits at the other. It is not only the badger sett but the operations that are necessary around it which render the amendments so necessary.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): My hon. Friend said earlier that licences would be issued to individuals but not to corporate bodies. Will they be issued to individuals on behalf of such bodies so that it will be easier to prosecute just one person?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I confess that I cannot answer that question. The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) may be able to enlighten my hon. Friend. I should have thought that it must have to do with ensuring that the person participating in the activity is the licensed person so that it is easier to keep tabs on him and ensure that he operates properly under the terms of the licence.

Who should be licensed? This is a fairly thorny problem, and one which hon. Members on both sides of the House will watch closely. It is no more in the interests of the sporting community than of other participants in the debate that people who are not fit and proper should be given licences, because they will give us all a bad name if they abuse their privilege.

There is general agreement that certain persons should not be granted licences—for instance, people convicted of offences against badgers or other wildlife. However, the British Field Sports Society, of which I am chairman, is extremely anxious that reputable people engaged in fox control should be able to obtain licences. Professional gamekeepers, hunt servants and members of fox destruction societies must be able to obtain licences provided that they are fit and proper people to hold them. I know that the Government have accepted that idea. Lord Astor told the other place that we need to be confident that anyone authorised to interfere with a badger sett for the purpose of fox control is suitable and responsible, and that would include gamekeepers, farmers, hunts, fox destruction organisations and any other suitable people. It is far more sensible to license these individuals for a particular area than to license the individual farmer or occupier who may be suffering problems caused by foxes. The administrative problems involved in issuing licences and vetting applicants must be kept within reasonable bounds.

I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has returned, because I come now to the subject about which he asked me. To insist on every individual occupier being the holder of a licence would lead to far too many licences. A farmer or occupier may not want to do the job himself and the badger sett in or near which the fox has taken refuge may not even be on his own land. It therefore makes every kind of sense that the person charged with the job of removing the fox from the badger sett or from the area of the badger sett should hold the licence.

How long should licences be issued for? As with shotgun licences and other forms of licence, the issuing of these licences must not create a huge administrative burden. I see no reason why a licence should be limited to a short time. The hon. Member for Newport, West will correct me if I am wrong, but I do not think that the time has been specified, so it will be up to the authorities concerned, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, to decide the length of validity of the licences, and we shall all want to put our own views on the matter.

Mr. Tony Banks: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for having left the Chamber for a few moments—a grateful constituent has just brought me a sheep's head—but I was wondering whether he had told the House while I was away how the licences will be operated. Will there be a ministerial visit or a visit by the Nature Conservancy Council, or will a licence just be granted on the say-so of the applicant?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: That, too, is a matter for the Ministry of Agriculture. The Bill does not specify how this will be managed. Like others, I wonder whether it is right that responsibility for all these activities to do with animals should be so diffusely held. It is sad that no Minister from the Ministry of Agriculture is here today to help my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, who will give us the Government's view. I do not know whether she knows what her colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture have in mind. No doubt she will enlighten us in a moment, but we shall have to explore the matter thoroughly. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West will have strong views to put to the Ministry, as will I.

I hope that we may say that we have reached common ground at least in so far as believing that it should be administratively simple to issue licences and to enable fit and proper people to hold them. We should not put too great a burden on the Ministry or on the NCC. The process must be monitored, however, to ensure that unfit people do not hold licences.

It is important that when the need for licences cannot be foreseen they can be granted speedily. That will remain at the discretion of the licence authorities. A rogue fox could cause serious lamb losses or damage to ground nesting birds during a delay of a few weeks. Once we know that a fox is operating in a given area he is likely to come back and do a great deal more damage unless he is killed. It is essential, therefore, that if there is a badger sett somewhere in the area, destruction of the fox is carried out speedily before too much damage is done to the farmer's

flock. I do not think that that has been decided yet. I am concerned that we should ensure that licences are issued speedily, where appropriate.

In most cases, gamekeepers, members of fox destruction societies and hunt staff will need a general licence in advance of a problem with a fox in or near a badger sett. The licences must run for a reasonable period —I should have thought at least on an annual basis. In the other place Lord Astor was able to confirm that licences would be issued in advance, and for a prolonged period, where regular fox control, for protection, may risk occasional interference with badger setts. I hope that such licences will be issued to the right people.

I am also a little concerned about the arrangements between licensing authorities. The Bill does not make it clear whether the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be the authority or whether, in given areas, it will be the Nature Conservancy Council. Before the Bill is on the statute book the Government should provide greater definition so that that point can be clarified.

Dr. Godman: Amendment No. 15 states that

"(6) A licence under this section shall not be unreasonably withheld or revoked"."

Could it not be that a person who feels that his application is entirely genuine has his application rejected and that he is then in a position to argue that it has been unreasonably withheld? Where would he take his case? Would there be an appeals system?

12 noon

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As the law stands, if I understand it correctly, if there is a provision that the Government may not act in a certain way but they do, there is recourse to the courts. How simple it would be to invoke that procedure I do not know, in the light of the generalities with which we have been dealing. We shall need to look closely at that point. It may be in everyone's interest that an arbitration system should be established. Nothing in the Bill would prevent that from being done, if the Government felt it to be appropriate. As an ex-practising lawyer, I am well aware of both the expense and the delay that can result from having to apply to the courts in such instances. I should much prefer an arbitration panel to decide at first instance whether a person had been unreasonably dealt with. If the arbitrator felt that that person had been unreasonably dealt with, that would be a much simpler, swifter and cheaper procedure, which I should welcome.

There is the question of who is to be the licensing authority, and in what circumstances. The position is not yet entirely satisfactory. We are not clear how licensing will work. None the less, I welcome these clauses, as amended. I am sure that they will set up a structure that can resolve these matters, with the assistance of the Minister. We shall have to get together to ensure that the Minister is aware of the needs of those who desire licences and of those who are rightly anxious that the wrong people should be prevented from obtaining them. A balance will have to be established to ensure that only those people who operate properly are allowed to have licences, and that when they are operating properly they should be allowed to get their licences without undue hindrance or difficulty and certainly not be refused without good grounds for doing so.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) have all mentioned the damage that is caused by foxes in the countryside. We heard the touching story of the geese of a constituent of the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West. I was the proud possessor of two geese at one time. They were bought for me. Unfortunately, Mrs. Banks imposed a block on them being brought home to my small garden in Forest Gate, on the ground that she thought that they were rather bad-tempered and frightening beasts. While they were being kept my two lovely geese were taken—it was alleged at the time, by badgers. I do not know who is telling the truth, but I do not bear badgers any ill will because they took my two geese. The hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West obviously feels upset about foxes, even though the geese he cited were not his.

I am not sure about the extent to which anecdotal evidence is admissible about fox damage. I accept that some damage is caused by foxes, but until there is a far more accurate scientific assessment, we are left with anecdotal arguments, which do not seem to be the best basis for making good legislation. I understand that a fox's diet is predominantly small rodents. I think that foxes are one of the greatest controllers of rats in the country. Foxes eat worms, carrion, frogs and insects. No doubt they take a sickly lamb from time to time, but that is nature's way of dealing with sick animals.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I think that the hon. Gentleman was out of the Chamber when I told the House that I lost three lambs from my park because of foxes. There is nothing anecdotal about that. It is factual. I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's implication that foxes normally eat insects, worms and frogs and occasionally sickly lambs. The lambs that were taken from my park were perfectly healthy—until they were eaten by the fox.

Mr. Banks: I was in the Chamber when the hon. Gentleman told the sad tale about the three lambs that he had lost. He said that all that was left was a severed head. Either someone was using a lamb for a rehearsal for "The Godfather", or one of his hungrier constituents may have decided to consume the carcase. I do not intend to reduce this to a Committee debate, but to what extent was the hon. Gentleman aware of the health of those lambs? He may say that they were bouncing around, as frisky as ever, and just waiting to end up on a plate with some new potatoes and mint sauce, but they may have been slightly sickly and that was why the fox took them.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The lambs were inspected daily. They were frisky, romping about and perfectly healthy until they were eaten. It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman's hungry constituents were therefore unable to come along and purchase them.

Mr. Banks: I still maintain that it may have been my constituents who took them. That is something that my constituents are wont to do from time to time. A little bit of poaching from the hon. Gentleman, since he can afford it, is not something that I would condemn unqualifiedly in this House. Those lambs, in the short term, would probably have been dead, anyway. Instead of being

[Mr. Banks]

consumed by foxes, they would undoubtedly have been consumed by the hon. Member for Upminister in perhaps more salubrious surroundings than a field.

I put it to the hon. Gentleman that foxes also have the right to live. The fox is indigenous to this country. There have been times when foxes have been introduced into certain areas for fox hunters. Under the circumstances, one is being harsh on foxes. They have the right to exist. Nature maintains a certain balance. We are constantly interfering with that balance. I merely wanted to say a word on their behalf, and in defence of foxes, since few hon. Members are prepared to defend them. I am. I am sure that, if they were able to vote, they would all vote for me in Newham, North-West.

On this occasion, I share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Upminster about amendments Nos. 13 and 15 on licensing. We share his concern, but perhaps for completely different reasons. Who knows? I have some questions for the Minister, although I understand her difficulties. Amendment No. 13 mentions every Department but hers, the Home Department. *[Interruption.]* The sartorial wear of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is getting better and better. He is wearing a very snazzy shirt. I am surprised, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you did not remember Mr. Speaker's ruling about hon. Members, however eminent, walking into this place without their jackets. However, the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale did—as did the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West, the epitome of sartorial elegance.

Mr. Bellingham *rose——*

Mr. Banks: No doubt the hon. Gentleman intends to make one of his telling points.

Mr. Bellingham: Although the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is always immaculately dressed, his hair is always well groomed and he is a picture of sartorial elegance, some of his colleagues flout Mr. Speaker's ruling by coming into the Chamber wearing trainers and no ties and looking like soccer hooligans. Will he comment on how his colleagues are normally dressed on a Tuesday or Thursday in the middle of summer?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) will not be diverted from the amendments.

Mr. Banks: Some of my best friends are soccer hooligans; it was unworthy of the hon. Gentleman to make that point.

I share some of the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Upminster. The Minister is the only Minister who does not appear to have responsibility, so it is unfortunate that she must reply to the debate. No Minister from Scotland, Wales, MAFF, or, on behalf of the Nature Conservancy Council, the Department of the Environment, is here to reply. I am aware of the Minister's competence, so no doubt she will be able to answer my questions.

I am concerned about the process by which applications for licences will be made. Will someone have to produce documentary or filmed evidence? Will a MAFF official have to make a physical inspection before granting a licence? I am distrustful of MAFF and of its attitude to badgers. Many people at the Ministry are still smarting about being made to cease gassing badgers in order to eliminate bovine tuberculosis. Plenty of evidence from around the world showed that badgers were not a major contributory factor in the spread of bovine TB. That problem seems to have disappeared and to have been replaced by other problems such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy. At least no one said that badgers were responsible for that.

I distrust MAFF, so I want to know how the process will operate. It would be preposterous if someone were granted a licence because they were a farm owner or a trustworthy type of fellow who hunted for lambs' heads with the hon. Member for Upminster. That seems to be too slack. I should like to know what specific proposals will be made for licence applications.

The hon. Member for Upminster said that the licence application was administratively simple. There is a difference between administratively simple and wholly permissive. It worries me that in the attempt to make applications administratively simple, they will be granted almost as soon as they are made. Lords amendment No. 15 says that a licence

"shall not be unreasonably withheld or revoked."

The hon. Member for Upminster, among his many talents, is not only a farmer but a lawyer. From time to time, he is able to squeeze in being a Member of Parliament—and a good one at that. He knows better than I do what is reasonable and has probably earned a lot of money from arguing it. I do not like such a word to appear in legislation because it is too open and allows too many lawyers to make too many fat fees.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: This is not the first time that the hon. Gentleman has commented on my activities, so perhaps I should put the record straight. I have not practised as a lawyer since I became an hon. Member. His remarks, are therefore not well founded.

Mr. Banks: Many defendants are probably grateful for that.

One must ask about reasonableness and the process. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) has accepted the Lords amendments. In many respects, he had no choice because of the problems that are associated with getting a Bill on to the statute book. He has done wonderfully well—far better than I did, but he is more reasonable than I am, which no doubt assisted him.

I am unhappy about the Lords amendments, and in normal circumstances I would have voted against them. On this occasion, I cannot do so, but I believe that we shall have to return to this subject when we try to toughen the badger setts legislation.

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief intervention at this late stage of the Bill, which is a good measure in so far as it has tightened provisions to safeguard badgers and has met some of the difficult objections.

I declare an interest as the owner of a considerable badger sett that is just behind my house. If anecdotal evidence is necessary, not so many weeks ago I was amused and enjoyed seeing four pairs of sharp little eyes pointing out of the sett that belonged not to badgers but to fox cubs. Frequently, the sett behind my house is occupied by one or the other.

12.15 pm

I have been asked to intervene to raise a problem that upsets and worries a number of my constituents—the urban badger sett. Those who live near such a sett are extremely worried about the damage that badgers cause. When legislation to protect the badger was introduced a few years ago, I took much trouble to find out how I could help my constituents, whose allotments, gardens and vegetables were being chewed up by badgers.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was able to help by catching some of the badgers and releasing them in a part of the country where there was a sett and where they could do no damage to my constituents' gardens and allotments. Will that still be possible under the licensing system?

I have written to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the problem. My constituents are worried about a large urban badger sett in a part of my constituency. Will MAFF officials or experts be able to capture some of those badgers, which have become prolific this year, and remove them to another area of the country where they will do no harm? Under the terms of the Bill, is that regarded as harmful to the badger or will it still be possible to license such activity?

Once badgers have been removed, their setts are liable to be taken over by rabbits, which is a nuisance, but there are means of overcoming that problem.

I received a deputation in my constituency of genuinely desperate people who wanted to strengthen the law to safeguard badgers against the detestable crime of badger baiting, which no one has time for. A few years ago, badgers in my constituency were transported elsewhere, but will it still be legitimate to do so under the licensing system proposed in the amendment?

Dr. Godman: I promise to be brief. A number of my young constituents urged me to be here this morning to support the Bill.

I should like to put a couple of questions to the Minister about my concerns on the issuing of licences. I asked the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) some questions about the amendments. As the Minister will know, they refer to the Secretary of State for Scotland and/or the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland being the licensors. Such issues are important and I ask the Minister to impress upon the different Departments the need for identical criteria under which licence applications are assessed, granted or rejected. Unlike the hon. Member for Upminster, I am not a lawyer. I readily acknowledge that we have two legal systems—the English and the Scottish—but nevertheless it is essential that the criteria for assessing such licence applications are identical.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: At the moment, it seems that that is still in the melting pot, as neither the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food nor its Scottish counterpart has made any decisions about the criteria that are to be applied. I endorse what the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said. It is important that the criteria for both parts of the United Kingdom are identical.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his fine intervention. If a Scottish applicant were rejected because of certain criteria that do not apply in the assessment of English or Welsh licences, he or she would have a pretty powerful case for appealing against such a decision. I know that the Minister cannot answer on behalf of her Scottish ministerial colleagues, but I should be grateful if she would make my remarks known to them in her characteristically courteous way.

I now deal with the issue of "a suitable person". Again, when referring to those who should be excluded from holding licences, the hon. Member for Upminster mentioned people who have criminal records, perhaps those who have convictions for poaching and especially for poaching with vicious traps. I should have thought that such a person would be rejected out of hand.

I hope that the officials who issue licences will be competent in the ways of country living and country activities, because local authorities could have to issue licences under the regulations. Competence is an important issue.

I asked the hon. Member for Upminster some questions about amendment No. 15 regarding the decisions made by officials to withhold or to revoke a licence. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the length of time that a licence would endure. A licence could have to be revoked because of an action committed by the licensee. I presume that such a person would have grounds for an appeal under the amendment and that he or she could claim that the licence had been unreasonably revoked.

In response to an intervention, the hon. Gentleman mentioned an arbitration system. An appeals procedure must be built into the licensing system, but it must not add to the bureaucracy of that system or make it much more cumbersome either to apply for a licence or for the authorities to revoke that licence if the holder has acted improperly. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) talked about what is reasonable. Amendment No. 15 would require that we determine what is unreasonable, which might be even more difficult. The Scottish Office, the Welsh Office, the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and others must work hand in glove when dealing with licensing. The criteria to be satisfied before a licence is granted must be tough. The officials who deal with the granting of licences must be competent in such matters. If possible, the criteria must be identical in each of the three nations. If licences are revoked or withheld there must be an appeals procedure, but it should not be a cumbersome addition to the system of granting, revoking or withholding licences.

Mr. Jopling: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen), I must declare an interest as I own a farm on which there is a badger sett which I have long tried to preserve, sometimes without success. Sometimes it is occupied by rabbits and sometimes by foxes, but I am always glad when the badgers come back.

I was interested to hear that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) agreed with the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) in doubting whether foxes cause ravages to lambs in upland areas. I confess that I was astonished to hear that two hon. Members doubt that, as it is understood that that is what happens in the Lake district. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Newham, North-West or his hon. Friend have spoken to upland farmers——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: I shall develop my argument and then I shall give way. One needs only to talk to upland farmers

[Mr. Jopling]

to hear that when they round up their flocks on the fells, they discover that large numbers of lambs have been savaged by foxes. Their first reaction is to ring the hunt to ask it to do something. The hunts are continually requested to move round the fells and mountainous areas to deal with foxes that are causing problems. If the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, doubts that, I will be most delighted to facilitate a visit by him to the Lake district. I do not know what he is doing on 8 August. I am the president of the Lake district sheepdog trials which will take place near Windermere and if he would like to come, I can arrange for a large number of farmers to talk to him——

Mr. Bellingham: Have him come and stay.

Mr. Jopling: I shall be glad for him to come and stay if he wishes to do so. It is the 100th celebration this year of the Lake district sheepdog trials. If he wants to come and talk to the farmers I shall be delighted to facilitate.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is the best offer that I have had for a long time. I will accept that offer and a pint of scrumpy, or whatever delightful brew is drunk in the right hon. Gentleman's area, will be imbibed by me as well. I shall have a good day out. He is right. There are not many upland farmers in Newham—indeed, there is not much in the way of uplands. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) was that there should be more scientific evidence. If that shows that the damage to which the right hon. Gentleman refers is taking place there must be ways of dealing with it. However, I doubt whether the best way in which to deal with it—if it is as widespread as the right hon. Gentleman suggests—is to bring in the hunt.

12.30 pm

Mr. Jopling: The wisdom and the experience of upland farmers in the Lake district is infinitely more compelling than all the scientific evidence that the rather clever chaps in sandals can put together. I recommend the hon. Member for Newham, North-West to talk to farmers so that he hears what happens on the ground.

The amendments will make it easier to control foxes in the areas in which it is absolutely essential to do so. I will not go into all the details about the importance of ensuring that foxes are properly controlled in upland areas, as I made that clear in my previous remarks. However, I welcome Lords amendment No. 11, which I am sure will make it easier to control foxes in the area that I represent where the livelihood of the local population is so dependent on the proper control of foxes.

I should like to address a question to the promoter of the Bill—the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes)—about Lords amendment No. 13, which deals with who issues licences. The amendment describes two bodies for England, five for Wales and two for Scotland. Will the two bodies decide between themselves who will issue the licences, or will both of them issue licences? I can envisage a situation in which a thoroughly undesirable person with convictions for badger baiting—someone with whom none of us would have any sympathy—hears, as word gets round in the local community, that perhaps the Secretary of State for Wales is an easier touch for a licence than is the Countryside Council for Wales. It is important that if both bodies are to issue licences, it is made clear that they are using the same criteria. None of us wishes to make it made easy for undesirable people to have licences to do those things. I hope that we can have some clarification on that point.

It was wise of the hon. Member for Newport, East to accept this group of amendments, as they will make the Bill much more acceptable in the areas that I represent where the terms of the Bill have caused some anxiety in the past. I hope that because of the wisdom of the hon. Gentleman, those anxieties can now be put at rest.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I shall try to reassure the House by saying something about the licensing proposals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) said, a new position has been created by the Bill. Because badger setts will be protected under the Bill, licences must be given under the Badgers Act 1973 for the removal of foxes from setts when it is necessary to do so to control the fox population. When the Bill was discussed in another place, a great deal of time was spent on the question of licensing.

A number of hon. Members have asked important questions this morning. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) hoped that the criteria would be clearly set out for all the agencies that will issue licences. The Government do not think that that will be a great problem. Because of the doubts that have been expressed about the Bill's implications for farmers, landowners and moorland gamekeepers, I am happy to repeat the Government's assurances on licensing.

The principal problem that has caused concern lies in ensuring that licences are given for legitimate fox control to protect not only sheep but poultry, game and wild birds. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) referred to that point, and the wife of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is worried about geese. Perhaps Forest Gate has become a geese-free or badger-free zone.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is certainly a Tory-free zone.

Mrs. Rumbold: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's wife will be less worried about geese after the discussions that may take place. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) suggested that we find out the facts.

All those who have been involved with the Bill have learnt that foxes often live alongside badger setts. Often it is not easy to tell whether a hole belongs to a fox or a badger, or both. Farmers whose livestock may be threatened by foxes must be able to take swift action to remove them. Because of the anxieties that were expressed in another place about the basis on which licences might be granted, I tell the House that the Government have held meetings with the Bill's sponsors, including those in the other place. We have offered to help in drafting a suitable amendment. I believe that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) should accept this measure as one that is, on the whole, worthy of us all.

Mr. Roy Hughes: I have expressed my readiness to accept the new amendment. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) will notice that in the amendment we are diversifying control to Wales and Scotland. I do not expect that there will be a problem,

especially in this age of technology and computers. There will be clear records of who is eligible for a licence and who is not.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving that information—as, I am sure, is my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale.

I wish to explain how the proposed licensing system will work. In the first place, we will need to be confident that anyone authorised to interfere with a badger sett for the purpose of fox control is suitable and responsible—thus, gamekeepers, farmers, fox hunts and destruction organisations would be considered for a licence, but convicted badger diggers would not. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) will be glad to hear that and to hear that the consultations which have taken place covered the point which he expressed and that all licences will be issued on a common basis. Local authorities will not issue them. Under Lords amendment No. 13, licences can be issued only by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and conservancy councils. I trust that that news puts to rest one of the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

There is also a provision that any licence under the Badgers Act 1973 should not be unreasonably withheld or revoked. Clearly, licensing authorities must act reasonably. We envisage that licences will be issued, in advance and for a long period, where regular fox control for protection may risk occasional interference with a badger sett. We would, of course, retain the right to revoke such a licence if a problem occurred.

I understand the problem raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen), because it arises not a million miles from my home, although perhaps not so near to my constituency. I assure my hon. Friend that there are powers in the Badgers Act 1973, as well as in the present Bill, to control urban badgers setts that are causing problems.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister said that, in certain cases where known fox activity occurs regularly, licences will be granted for a lengthy period. She said that there would be a power to revoke, but did not say anything about a power to monitor or about whether the licences would be monitored. I am concerned that, if open-ended licences are granted, all sorts of abuses could occur. There should be a failsafe mechanism.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that, and we shall certainly register that concern when we put together the criteria for granting licences.

We also envisage assessing in advance of lambing the position of sheep farmers whose flocks are in danger from foxes living in badger setts, so that licences may be issued either in advance or speedily when the need arises. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West have a dispute about that. I shall not enter into it, because I am not well versed in countryside issues. I represent an urban constituency and am therefore more concerned with urban than with rural farms; indeed, I am the proud owner of a particularly attractive urban farm.

Mr. Boscawen: I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about urban badger setts. May I perhaps be sent information setting out the provisions in the Bill that would allow the actions of which I spoke to be taken?

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall be happy to furnish my hon. Friend with as much information as possible; I shall ensure that a letter is sent to him on Monday.

Licences will not necessarily be restricted to a single sett. Although they will relate to a specified area, that area could include a number of farms.

It goes without saying that licences granted under the provision would not be for the taking or killing of badgers and a condition of the licence might be that the person authorised should take reasonable care to avoid causing harm to a badger. That is another point about which my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome is concerned. The licence conditions could also specify just what may, or may not, be done to a badger sett.

Under the present Act, there are different licensing authorities for different situations—in some cases, the Agriculture Departments; in others, the Nature Conservancy Councils.

I note the concern expressed by a number of hon. Members about the fact I should be dealing with the Bill and with other matters affecting animals as part of my ministerial responsibilities. I shall certainly register the concern expressed about the allocation of responsibilities to the Department of the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and other Departments, although I believe that the Home Office is as good a Department as any to deal with these matters and that on this Bill, as on previous Badgers Bills, we have managed to give the promoters some satisfaction. I therefore note the point about responsibilities lying with a number of agencies, but I am not convinced by the argument.

The principle applying to the new licensing agencies will be set out clearly. The licensing authorities will work together as at present to establish common guidelines for issuing licences. The aim is to develop a system that is simple, straightforward and just. We shall consult interested organisations, including those that have played a considerable part in the discussions about the Bill.

We shall consider which licensing authority will be responsible for different areas of licensing. That will be a matter for consultation. In principle, we believe that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will issue licences relating to agricultural land and livestock and that the Nature Conservancy Council will issue licences with regard to wildlife. I should have thought that that was relatively straightforward.

Dr. Godman: Will the licence fee be modest?

Mrs. Rumbold: I cannot comment on that now. It will be a matter for discussion and if the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow wants to raise a point about that, I am sure that he will be able to do so.

Mr. Jopling: As I understood my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, she said that our right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will issue licences in respect of agricultural land, while the conservation bodies will grant them in respect of wildlife. Who would be the licensing authority for a game park,

[Mr. Jopling]

which seems to encompass neatly both areas? I was thinking of that sort of case when I made the point a few moments ago.

12.45 pm

Mrs. Rumbold: One of the benefits of this debate is that those points can be made. We must clearly take note of the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and ensure that the responsibility lies with the correct agency. My right hon. Friend made a telling point and we recognise that there will be cases where the areas of responsibility will overlap. There will have to be consultations with the interested parties to decide which licensing authority will issue licences in certain cases.

It is also important to state that the administrative arrangements for licensing must be worked out properly and an amendment has been included, as hon. Members will have noticed, to extend the time to allow the necessary consultation to be conducted over the summer before the Bill comes into force.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West asked whether visits would be paid to licence applicants. I assure him that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will consult interested parties on how licences are issued. In some cases a visit may be necessary, but in others a licence may be issued without a visit. We have yet to finalise the practicalities of that system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) asked whether licences could be issued to individuals or to organisations. That was an interesting question. The answer is that licences would have to be issued to individuals, although they could be issued to named representatives of organisations such as fox destruction societies.

Hon. Members have expressed concerns which I trust that I have answered satisfactorily. The consultations between MAFF, the nature conservancy agencies in England, Scotland and Wales and the interested organisations will lead to satisfactory procedures. This debate has been helpful in identifying concerns that will have been noted by those who will participate in the consultations.

I have just received a note from the people who do not exist and I can inform the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that the licences will be issued without a fee. That may be of great comfort to him.

I congratulate everyone involved in steering the Bill safely through its various stages in this House and in another place. It is to everyone's credit that we have a measure today that can be supported by all sides. That is a good reflection of the spirit of co-operation that has existed throughout the passage of the Bill. Hon. Members have raised points about which they feel strongly, and answers have been given. There has been a great deal of co-operation to ensure that a sensible measure is put on the statute book.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for introducing his Bill and for the climate that he has so skilfully created around it. The success of the Bill is a tribute to the part that has been played by him and his advisers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that so many of my hon. Friends are happy to join me in that tribute. I must pay tribute also to my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster and for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison), to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and to various other colleagues for the part that they have played in building the consensus that has now come to fruition.

I know that there has been a lot of debate and quite a bit of hard bargaining behind the scenes, but the achievement is clear for all to see. Finally, and without more ado, I express the Government's view that we are extremely glad that the Bill will soon be on the statute book. Indeed, this Session has been notable for the amount of legislation relating to badgers. This Bill provides increased protection for badgers. The Badgers (Further Protection) Bill will shortly receive Royal Assent and the Criminal Justice Bill contains increased penalties. All round, 1991 has not been a bad year for the badger. Perhaps it could successfully be nominated the Year of the Badger.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 5

AMENDMENT OF S.11 OF BADGERS ACT 1973

Lords amendment No. 16, in page 3, leave out lines 14 and 15 and insert

("signs indicating current use by a badger").

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Roy Hughes.]*

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not wish to detain the House, but it is important to mention that it is critical to the success of the Bill that the definition of badger setts should be correct. We have had much debate about the correct definition of a badger sett and I am now satisfied with the Lords amendment, which refers to

"signs indicating current use by a badger".

For all the reasons that were expressed earlier, it is clearly important that empty holes, pipes and other places where badgers occasionally live should not be brought within the scope of the Bill or it will become unworkable and many people in the countryside will be unable to pursue their lawful interests. Therefore, I very much welcome the amendment with its satisfactory wording and I am happy to join the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) in recommending it to the House.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am not happy with the amendment because it weakens the Bill. We have had long arguments about how a badger sett should be defined and about whether someone found interfering with a badger sett could be excused if they said that they had believed that the sett had been vacated. One could make many points about this issue, including the fact that badgers have been known to leave their setts and to return to them later. Members of Parliament are not the only creatures on this planet to have two homes—badgers sometimes have two homes. I had hoped that the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) would be a damned sight more sympathetic towards badgers than he has been. On this occasion, he has got what he wanted—a looser definition of a badger sett which, as I have said, is a weakening of the Bill. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) says "Come off it" or some such phrase that he has got from Jeeves and Wooster, but I will

not come off it because I believe that the amendment weakens the Bill. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) I must perforce accept it. Unless we do, I doubt whether the hon. Member for Upminster and the forces of darkness on the Government Benches would allow the Bill to proceed. I register my protest, but I must accept the amendment.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman referred to me "and" the forces of darkness, thus clearly differentiating between the two. I am sorry about the hon. Gentleman's attitude to the amendment. He should accept that badger baiters will attack the live badger where he is, and they will be responsible for their actions under the terms of the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman is entirely candid, as he has always claimed to be, he will accept that the purpose of the Bill is to get the badger baiter and not to try to obstruct fox hunting. That being so, I do not think that he should take the attitude that he does to the amendment.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Member for Upminster, or Darth Vader, as he is known among his admirers, knows that the amendment represents what he fought long to get into the Bill. I do not believe that he or any other Conservative Member supports badger baiting. The one thing that united us throughout was that no one in this place represents badger baiters. Indeed, many of us would do unspeakable things to the baiters when they were caught. In that sense, we are united. The amendment protects the sport that the hon. Gentleman supports, but in which he does not participate—that is, fox hunting. The amendment will make life easier for fox hunters and therefore I am opposed to it, but at this stage I have no alternative but to accept it.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 6

CITATION AND COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendment: No. 17, in page 3 line 17, leave out ("two") and insert ("three")

Mr. Roy Hughes: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment lengthens the period that shall pass before this measure comes into force from two to three months, and I accept it.

Question put and agreed to.

Smoke Detectors Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I understand that the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) has the authority of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) to speak on his behalf.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): That is so, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Clause 1

NEW DWELLINGS TO BE FITTED WITH SMOKE DETECTORS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 17, leave out subsection (5).

Mr. Bellingham: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 4.

Mr. Bellingham: Lords amendment No. 1 is an amendment of convenience. As the definitions will be included in clause 6, there is no need for subsection (5).

Lords amendment No. 3 is important. Lord Wade of Chorlton, to whom I pay tribute, received representations from the National House Building Council. I understand that the provisions of the Bill will be enforced by the person who is enforcing the building regulations of 1985, which relate to other aspects of the construction of the dwelling. Before 1984, that work was always carried out by the local authority. It was undertaken exclusively by local council building inspectors. In 1984, the Government decided to allow the private sector to take part by extending authority to inspect to the NHBC. That system has worked well and 35 per cent. of inspections are now carried out by the council.

It is apparent that the system must make sense. Although inspections are often carried out by building control officers who are employed by the local authority, part II of the Building Act 1984 enables building works to be supervised by approved inspectors from the private sector. That is the point of the 1984 Act. The NHBC has been approved as an inspector of the construction of most new dwellings and if it asks that the role of approved inspectors should be specifically recognised in the Bill, that must make sense. It would not be satisfactory if local authorities had to enforce the provisions of the Bill when an approved inspector was enforcing the requirements of building regulations. I am sure that that was not the intention of the Bill.

The new clause is modelled on the relative provisions of the Building Act 1984. When an approved inspector, rather than a local authority, is appointed for the purposes of building control, an initial notice must be served on the local authority. When the approved inspector is satisfied that the work has been completed in accordance with the regulations, he will issue a final certificate to that effect. When an initial notice is in force or a final certificate has been given, the local authority cannot take action to enforce the building regulations.

1 pm

The new clause would operate in exactly the same way if an approved inspector had been appointed in respect of work consisting of the construction of a dwelling. That approved inspector would also be responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Bill. He must certify that he has done so when he issues his final certificate. The amendment may be complicated, but it is important, and I hope that I have explained it reasonably competently.

Questions have been raised about exemptions. If the NHBC believes that its staff are fully qualified—and in many ways they may be as well qualified or even better qualified than inspectors employed by local authorities —surely the NHBC should be allowed to make exemptions. There was a lengthy debate about that in the other place which I am sure will continue. At a time when central Government, arguably, are giving more and more work to local authorities in some areas, this may be one area where local authority expenditure could be saved. We will come back to this aspect of the Bill later. In some ways, it is a controversial aspect, which is why, under the Lords amendment, NHBC inspectors would not be allowed to make exemptions. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I apologise to my hon. Friend for missing the opening part of his speech. Surely the question whether NHBC staff should be allowed to issue exemptions does not relate merely to qualifications. We accept that its staff are just as good as those employed by local authorities. Perhaps it is a question of people being recognised as being in a position of authority, rather than of the qualifications of those who exercise that authority.

Mr. Bellingham: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and that is probably why the other place decided not to give NHBC staff the power to make exemptions. The NHBC was first allowed into this area of work only in 1984, seven years ago, but it has done extremely well. Some 32 per cent. of all inspections are now done by NHBC staff. Perhaps the time will come when their reputation and standing will have risen to such a level that it will make sense to allow them to make exemptions. I hope that the House agrees to the amendment.

Lords amendment No. 4 is a purely technical amendment which does not require much explanation. It is about definitions. It must be read in conjunction with Lords amendment No. 1, which would delete clause 1(5) because its provisions are repeated in Lords amendment No. 4, which would insert new clause 6.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am grateful to the hon. Members for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) for their clear explanations. What will be the precise effect of amendment No. 1, which will remove line 17 onwards of clause 1? Will it exclude reconstructed or converted dwellings, as opposed to those built from scratch? If so, I would regret it.

I freely admit that I come late to the general debate on smoke detectors, but, in common with some other hon. Members, I have been abruptly brought face to face with the importance of the issue. Last week in my constituency, a mother and five of her children died in a council house fire. I began this week by attending their funeral, and it was the saddest event that I have ever witnessed. The House must do whatever it can to make it less likely that such a terrible event will happen again.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's view. Smoke detectors can save many lives, and clearly it would have been desirable for the House involved in that tragic accident to be fitted with them. The purpose of the Bill is not to insist on the installation of smoke detectors in all old properties and new houses, but to persuade people to fit them in older properties and to legislate for their fitting in new houses.

Mr. Wilson: I was certainly deeply impressed by my conversation in the aftermath of that tragic accident with the chief fire master of Strathclyde region, Mr. John Jameson. He was emphatic that, in the fire I have described, lives would have been saved if smoke detectors had been fitted to the property. He estimated that about half the lives lost in house fires would be saved if smoke detectors were always fitted. That is a striking statistic in the context of the Bill, and it should be taken account of.

I congratulate also the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) on his efforts. The original Bill covered wider ground, but the Government and the House should welcome the coverage given by the Bill to new properties, which is welcome and desirable. I hope that the amendment will extend its provisions to reconstructed or renovated dwellings. However, it still does not go far enough and we must set our sights on something much better. It should be mandatory to fit smoke detectors in all houses and flats—whether they are owner-occupied or private or public sector rented accommodation. If the House shares that view, I am sure that legislation could be easily introduced and with virtually no public expenditure implications.

I do not advocate the armies of inspectors should be established to enforce such legislation. When seat belts became mandatory the law was respected; if we legislated to make smoke detectors compulsory in all homes, I believe that most people would observe the law without weighty enforcement measures.

In the aftermath of the fire in my constituency, in the town of Kilbirnie, there has been massive media interest in smoke detectors. I commend the Glasgow *Daily Record* for the campaign that it has led, which has had a huge impact on public opinion. I am told that, all over the west of Scotland, the shops that sell smoke detectors, at modest prices, are sold out of them. People have been brought face to face with the fact that, for a few pounds, little lives and big lives can be saved.

Within a few weeks of this tragedy, interest will have moved on to some other subject and the impetus towards installing devices will be lost. The House has a role to play in maintaining that impetus by legislating accordingly.

I have tabled an early-day motion, with the support of the hon. Members for York and for Norfolk, North-West, and with all-party support. As of this morning, 117 signatures have been appended to it and I hope that a great many more will be added in the next few days. I hope that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members will sign the motion, since that will bring home to the Government, on a non-party political basis, the impression that the dominant school of thought in the House believes that something can be done, which does not involve significant public expenditure.

This idea commands the wholehearted support of the fire service whose members have to deal with these tragedies—the most emotional and desperate experiences in most people's lives. They have repeatedly asked why cheap smoke detectors cannot be fitted to save lives. I hope that the Government will listen. The idea involves little public expenditure—possibly none. If we legislate accordingly, no one involved has the slightest doubt that lives will be saved—and there are few pieces of legislation of which that could be said with such utter certainty.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope that many hon. Members will have listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), because what he said about the potential for saving life and avoiding tragedy was correct.

I wish to explain my part in this Bill as it is a rather curious one. Early in the year I objected to it, mainly on the ground that it insisted on introducing smoke detectors for old buildings as well as new. Later when the Bill reappeared I did not realise, perhaps because I had not been told, that my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) had removed old buildings from the Bill. The Lords amendments do not reintroduce them. If they did, I would have serious reservations, for reasons that I will make clear——

Mr. Wilson: Since fires undoubtedly happen more often in old houses than in new and lives are lost more often in the former than in the latter, what is the logic of opposing the installation of these devices in older properties while supporting it for new ones?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am not opposed to the installation of smoke alarms in old buildings—far from it. They should be introduced into every single building in the country. Their value is without question. However, what I oppose is legislation that would be ineffective or unenforceable. We should not insist on smoke alarms being introduced into old buildings if the legislation would place a burden on local authorities that they were unable to fulfil. If legislation cannot be enforced, it brings all our legislation slightly into disrepute. Unenforceable legislation is always bad legislation. I shall give the reasons why I believe that this is unenforceable legislation by mentioning the tragedy that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North raised.

1.15 pm

Many people have suggested that there should not be an army of inspectors going round all old buildings as well as all new buildings to discover whether smoke alarms have been fitted and whether they are working. The hon. Gentleman made that point. The only alternative is to ask a person who has suffered a fire in their home whether a smoke alarm had been fitted. That is the only moment at which one can discover whether someone had fitted a smoke alarm. In the tragedy to which the hon. Gentleman referred, if the mother had survived that fire but all her children had been killed, she would have been asked at the worst possible time in her life whether she had fitted a smoke alarm. She would have been asked whether she had broken the law, at just the moment when she had lost her children and was experiencing a tragedy that very few of us can begin to comprehend. To hit someone at that stage with the potential of a criminal case would be inhumane.

I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the value of introducing smoke detectors. I have four of them in my house. Occasionally they go off when my cooker goes wrong and I am delighted that they do. However, to insist that they should be introduced into my house, with the sanction of a criminal penalty, seems to me to be wrong.

Mr. Wilson: I acknowledge the validity of the hon. Gentleman's point, but does he accept that his argument is not absolute—that a balance of arguments is involved? While the danger exists of criminalising people who have already suffered a great deal, by definition that is likely to arise in only a tiny number of cases. That has to be weighed against the other certainty that many such fires would be pre-empted if such legislation were on the statute book. There is a balance, regarding which a mature judgment has to be made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are straying a long way from the Lords amendment.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The relevance of this point to the Lords amendment is the question that the hon. Gentleman raised whether the Lords amendment covers old buildings, or whether it refers merely to new buildings. That is a central issue in the debate and it needs to be cleared up before we decide whether to support the amendments. I hope, therefore, that we shall be allowed to debate it.

I accept entirely the hon. Gentleman's point that it is a matter of balance. I have made my own judgment about the balance, which is partly affected by the question whether local authorities are already inspecting houses. Because of the difficulties that local authorities have in inspecting houses in multiple occupation for normal fire requirements, I believe that they would be burdened with a task that they would be unable to fulfil. For example, they would be burdened with the task of checking whether the batteries of smoke alarms that had been fitted were up to strength. We would create the criminal offence of merely allowing a battery in a smoke detector to run down. We should hesitate long and hard before doing that.

There is an alternative that involves persuasion and as many people as possible listening to the good, persuasive and effective speech that the hon. Member for Cunningham, North made in favour of smoke alarms.

Mr. Michael Stern: (Bristol, North-West): Before my hon. Friend leaves the valid point that he is making, may I ask whether he agrees that in trying not to place a heavy burden on local authorities, we must consider changed construction techniques such as system building? A builder can construct a dwelling at a certain cost only within a certain time scale. If he must wait for a local authority to check smoke detectors, his time scale, work programme and costings will be thrown out.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive my saying that I do not agree with him. The Bill is intended to insist on the installation of smoke detectors and alarms in new buildings, and rightly so, because local authorities must inspect new buildings in any event. They could combine the inspection of smoke detectors with their other inspections of fire doors and foundations. They must be fairly assiduous in inspecting new buildings. The possible application of the Bill to old buildings would place a burden on local authorities.

Mr. Wilson: This is the last time that I shall intervene as I do not wish to prolong the debate. The hon.

[Mr. Wilson]

Gentleman mentioned multiple occupancy houses. The Strathclyde fire master expressed concern to me about the private rented sector, which is particularly vulnerable to fire. I do not underestimate the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but a balance must be struck, because for the first time the onus to take fire precautions would be placed on the private landlord. Does he agree that the difficulties are outweighed by such an onus being imposed?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I agree that it is a matter of balance. Further provision could be introduced to deal with the landlords of multiple occupation buildings. I accept that such dwellings are a high risk.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): My hon. Friend made an important point about old buildings and the maintenance of smoke detectors. Should not responsiblity be devolved to insurance companies, which would require the policyholder to maintain the smoke detector because if he did not do so his claim would be invalidated?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is very interesting, but it has precious little to do with the amendments that the House is supposed to be discussing.

Mr. Arbuthnot: You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be relieved to hear that I am drawing my remarks to a close.

A case could be made for placing the onus on insurance companies, but it would be difficult to assess whether a battery was in good condition after a fire had occurred.

I hope that the Bill will not apply to old buildings. Hon. Members can try to raise people's awareness of smoke detectors and try to persuade the owners of old houses, rather than to legislate to install smoke detectors, which are extremely valuable.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I have listened carefully to the debate—not without some emotion, as I would undoubtedly have lost my family, or at least my two oldest children, if smoke detectors had not been fitted to my house.

About five or six years ago, the House sat very late one night and I did not go home. It was the first and, I believe, the only time that I have done that without letting my wife know that I should have to stay in London. I had expected to get away, but, as sometimes happens in the House, I was detained much longer than I had expected and was unable to get home. I rang home in the morning at about 8 o'clock and cheerily said that I supposed everything was all right. The reply was almost unprintable because everything was not all right. My daughter, who was then about eight years old, had been asleep in her room and had inadvertently knocked over an electric fire which was allegedly safe for children but was obviously not. The curtains, carpet and furniture in her room had caught fire. She was asleep but the smoke detector went off and, luckily, woke my wife who was in the next room. She went into my daughter's room and turned on the light, but the smoke was so thick that it made no difference and she was unable to see anything. There is no doubt that my children would have perished in the fire if smoke detectors had not been fitted in that room. I am grateful for your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in allowing me to say that, and it is the background of what I have to say about the amendments.

It is important that the Government should make a commitment to ensure that smoke detectors are fitted in new buildings. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) that it would be impractical, though desirable, to insist that they be fitted to all old houses. My house was built in 1570 and I have had many smoke detectors fitted in it, but I do not believe in the concept of the nanny state. Individuals must be expected and allowed to look after their own interests. There is a limit to what the Government can do to interfere by ordering people to take steps in the interests of their own safety, however necessary and desirable those steps might be.

It would be hopelessly impractical for all old houses to be inspected to ascertain whether smoke alarms had been fitted. Would they be inspected every time there was a change of ownership, every time there was a change in the circumstances, or would such an inspection be a one-off operation? It would not be right for the Government to put that burden on local authorities and to force them to inspect every house in their area to check whether alarms had been fitted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford was also right to say that there is no earthly use in fitting alarms unless people are prepared to look after them properly. Human nature being what it is, I am afraid that if alarms were fitted in houses where people did not care whether they worked or not, they would not be properly maintained. It is quite a chore to ensure that batteries are replaced when they run out and to ensure that the machine is working properly. I do not believe that many people, in practice, would maintain smoke alarms in those circumstances.

Therefore, I query whether the Bill would have the effect that we hope. It is one thing to place a duty on constructors to fit smoke alarms in the houses that they build, as I believe that the Bill as amended would do, but it is another to ensure that they are working when they are needed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I must tell the House that this is not Second or Third Reading. We are debating Lords amendments, and I very much hope that the debate will draw nearer to them than it has come so far.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The part of the amendment with which I shall deal in detail is that which covers inspection. The purpose of the amendment is to bring the Bill into line with the Building Act 1984. It is in that context that we are considering the extent to which it is feasible for those inspections to be carried out, and to be carried out properly.

Mr. Arbuthnot: What I am about to say may to an extent argue against what I said earlier. Smoke detectors are now made with a clever device which means that when the battery is running flat it makes an appallingly nasty squeak. The incentive to change it becomes greater the flatter the battery gets.

1.30 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend is right up to a point, but in the end the squeak also dies. There have been occasions on which, the squeak having died, I forgot about the need to replace the battery and it was a little while before the battery was duly replaced. Although I do not claim to be less fallible than anyone else, I do not think

that I am more fallible. I suspect that that would be reasonably common practice in houses in which smoke alarms are fitted, especially when they are fitted without the agreement of the occupier of the house. There is nothing in the Bill, even as amended, which puts a duty on the occupier of a house either to have a smoke alarm fitted or to maintain it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon.Gentleman must speak to the amendment.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I was led slightly astray by the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford. I apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Will the hon. Gentleman assure me that he is coming to the amendment?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am. The question is whether the inspection of the house can be properly carried out, in the context of the amendment and whether only new houses will be fitted with smoke alarms. I question whether the local authorities which will have the duty to inspect the houses will welcome that duty. It is unlikely that local government, which has already rightly complained that central Government continue to give it added responsibilities without enough funds, will welcome an additional duty on its building inspectors or be able to enforce its being carried out. That is the crux of my worry.

I do not believe that the way in which the inspections will be carried out will safeguard the lives of the people in the buildings concerned. The amendment, which beings the matter within the Building Act 1984, is not helpful. It excludes a course that easily could have been taken, which would have enormously strengthened the working of the Act. I refer to the way that outside the context of the 1984 Act, there are many instances in which the National House Building Council inspectors are authorised to make inspections and to do work on behalf of the local authorities.

To be fair to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), this is not his Bill, so he may not be able to answer me. I am reasonably confident that, under the terms of the amendment, the NHBC inspectors will not be able to carry out inspection of the properties. If I am right, we are missing a great opportunity to facilitate the inspection of such properties. I would go further. The question of ensuring that the house is a fit and proper dwelling is complicated. It is something which only a qualified building inspector, architect or surveyor can determine. However, the duties imposed by the Bill and the people who are authorised by the amendment to carry them out are not compatible. Anyone can easily check whether smoke alarms have been, or are to be, fitted to houses. It would not take anyone with a great professional qualification to ensure that the smoke detectors are put in places so that the house was safe.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. If, like me, he has fitted smoke detectors, he will know that the inspection requirements of a building inspector can be different from the inspection requirements for smoke detectors. One must envisage the use to which a particular house, or a room in the house, will be put. For example, there could be no point in putting a smoke detector in a hall if it was the occupant's intention to place a small stove in the hall, directly under the detector because it would be set of by such things as a deep chip frier. We are extending the requirements of inspection beyond those already in place.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right. Buildings can be changed. A room that is not designed as a kitchen may subsequently be used as one. If the person charged with the duty to inspect were charged to do that once, and once only, at completion of the work, there would be a great loophole. It would be much more satisfactory—it may not be too late for the Government to do this—to ensure that many more people are qualified to inspect than is provided for under the new clause.

I strongly believe that the criterion for the inspectorate is far too narrow. If many more people were allowed to inspect, the Bill would be greatly strengthened.

Lords amendment No. 4 refers to construction

"by reconstructing or converting a building or any part of a building".

This is where we come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford. It is difficult to know where that measure begins and ends. The shell of a house may be reconstituted. Flats in my constituency are vacated for a period and then reconstituted by the local authority. Will such buildings be within the ambit of the Bill? What does "reconstruction" mean? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can enlighten me.

If the Bill is to be effective, all substantial building work on houses should be brought within its ambit. It is no use imposing a limited duty on those who construct new houses if the proportion of new houses to the 22·7 million houses in the housing stock—I have not checked the figure —means that the Bill has a limited effect.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): My hon. Friend will not have had the chance this afternoon to go on to the Terrace pavilion, which is a semi-permanent construction. Pavilions were erected at Stoneleigh for the Royal Show this week. How would the Bill deal with such places?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: On behalf of the Bill's sponsors, I can reassure my hon. Friend. New clause 6 in Lords amendment No. 4 makes it clear that the Bill applies only to dwellings. My understanding of the definition of "dwelling" is that it is something in which people live, as opposed to a place that they visit at Henley or Wimbledon, or the House of Commons. I do not believe that the obligation to install smoke detectors will be imposed on people who erect such places.

My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) mentioned a loophole. The word "dwelling" is far too narrow a term. I do not necessarily think that smoke detectors should be fitted to every tent at every function, but many constructions that are not dwellings put people in them at great risk. The Bill should cover all places that should be fitted with smoke alarms—for example, restaurants and places that are permanent structures but not dwellings and where large numbers of people congregate.

The Lords amendments leave the provisions of the Bill far too narrow. Those who, under the Bill, have a duty to inspect are a much smaller group than those who are qualified to inspect and could do so. They will be charged with the duty only of inspecting new buildings, and will therefore look at only a tiny proportion of the dwelling houses in Britain. Moreover, as I understand the terms of

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

the Bill as amended, the duty to install smoke detectors will be placed only upon those who construct dwellings and not upon those who live in them or on those subsequently involved in their sale or resale.

With all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory), whose worthy aim I applaud, I feel that the achievements of the Bill will be minimal in terms of saving the lives that we all wish to be saved.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): We have had a valuable little debate on a Bill which we did not have the opportunity to debate on Second or Third Reading. I shall respond as briefly as I can to the points that have been made.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory), who is responsible for the Bill. It is an indication of his deep concern about this important issue that he took the trouble to pilot the Bill, which has so far received a fairly smooth passage, through its earlier stages. It is characteristic of my hon. Friend's commitment to his constituency and to the interests of his constituents that he has had to give priority to an engagement in York. He told me this morning how much he had hoped to be here to take his one opportunity to speak to the Bill on the Floor of the House. My hon. Friend's constituents are extremely lucky to be represented by such a diligent Member of Parliament; long may he continue here. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) has proved to be an admirable replacement and gave an eloquent and concise summary of the amendments. I confess that I was not previously aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the subject, but he has mastered the detail remarkably quickly.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who has apologised for having to leave the House before the end of the debate, and is now on his way to his constituency, spoke movingly of the recent appalling tragedy in Scotland. I entirely understand his views, but I must emphasise that there are very real problems of enforcement. The argument against extending the requirement to all existing dwellings was effectively put by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), who also apologised for having to leave before the end of the debate. The approach adopted in the Bill is that smoke detectors should be installed in all new dwellings and I hope that by that example, we shall persuade owners and tenants of older dwellings also to install detectors in their homes. The Government are strongly in favour of the installation of detectors in all dwellings—old and new. We do not, however, believe that it is appropriate to extend the criminal law for the purpose of enforcing the installation of detectors in older dwellings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) spoke of his personal experience—of which I did not previously know—of the value of smoke alarms. I point out to him that one advantage of confining the Bill to new dwellings is that such buildings will be routinely inspected—whether by local authorities or by the National House Building Council, as the amendments provide. We can therefore ensure that, at that stage at least, scrutiny confirms that a smoke detector has been installed. That can be done without any additional bureaucratic imposition and without extra time being involved.

Mr. Stern: Will my hon. Friend consider the point that I raised with my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), which was that it is not sufficient simply to inspect to ensure that a smoke detector has been installed? It is also necessary to ensure, by reference to all conceivable uses of the building, that the detector has been installed in the correct place.

Mr. Yeo: I intended to refer to that point, which draws attention to a difficulty. I do not think that it will ever be possible to make 100 per cent. certain that smoke detectors are always in precisely the place that they should be, for the reasons that my hon. Friend gave during his earlier intervention. The uses of particular rooms in a house will change from time to time. Unless attention is paid to the position of the smoke detector each time that occurs, there may be occasions when the existence of the smoke detector may not be sufficient to guarantee the prevention of a fire. Nevertheless, my hon. Friends will agree that the provisions make it at least likely that a number of fires that would have occurred will be prevented by virtue of the fact that new dwellings have smoke detectors.

1.45 pm

Furthermore, the process of requiring detectors to be installed in new dwellings and the fact that this debate is taking place today will help to persuade others, particularly in older dwellings, of the importance of installing smoke detectors. We are helping a valuable measure through the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West explained the effect of the amendments very clearly. The most important point is that the crucial role that approved inspectors can already play in the building control system is now recognised by the amendments. They are clearly extremely sensible amendments and the Government fully support them. I commend them to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2

RELAXATION OF REQUIREMENT AS TO SMOKE DETECTORS

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 2, line 5, at end insert —

("( ) Before giving a direction under subsection (1) above, a local authority (other than the Council of the Isles of Scilly) shall consult the fire authority for the area in which the dwelling is or is to be situated.")

Mr. Bellingham: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the tribute that he paid to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory), who, as he rightly said, has had to return to his constituency. he has entrusted to me the task of moving the Lords amendments.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Has he gone back to his constituency because he is worried that he will lose his deposit at the next general election?

Mr. Bellingham: No, he has gone back because he is an extremely assiduous and hard-working Member. He has returned to honour a very long-standing engagement. That remark from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was completely unnecessary.

Amendment No. 2 relates to consulting the local fire authority. Clause 2 relates to exemptions. We all agree that there must be some exceptions. For example, when

refurbishing historic homes or other buildings of considerable importance to our heritage it would be out of place to have smoke detectors on a Grinling Gibbons ceiling. Those exceptions and exemptions must be kept to a bare minimum.

We are talking about lives being at stake. On average every year 700 people die in homes as a result of fires in which smoke is involved. In addition, 10,000 people are injured in such incidents every year. Those figures are horrendous. People will recall that appalling disaster when the Piper Alpha platform caught fire. One hundred and sixty-seven people died in that tragedy, but every year 700 people die in their homes as a result of fires. I believe that many of those lives could be saved if those homes had smoke detectors.

In that context, and as we are talking about consulting the fire authorities, I am in order if——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that the Chair will decide what is and what is not in order. I take this opportunity to remind him and the House that I also have a duty to protect the rights of other hon. Members whose Bills await us and are on the Order Paper. I very much hope that the House will debate the Lords amendment and not the generality of clause 2.

Mr. Bellingham: I apologise for trying to usurp your position, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that you will forgive me for that impertinence.

The Norfolk fire service has devised several extremely important initiatives. One of those, its smoke detector campaign, has been running for two and a half years. As a result, 47 per cent. of all dwellings in Norfolk now have smoke detectors. That is 15 per cent. above the national average. In the last calendar year, there were 667 fires and 801 chimney fires in Norfolk. The Norfolk fire service has told me that those figures would have been much worse without its smoke detector campaign, which has increased the number of smoke detectors to an extremely high level. That must not go unrecorded, because it is crucial.

It is important that local authorities produce schemes to install smoke detectors on council estates. Norwich city council has carried out a pilot scheme, which involves a team of officers from the fire service meeting the occupiers of the homes in question to tell them about safety issues. I am informed that one councillor in Norwich, Andy Paynes, carried out a poll which produced the staggering result that since the pilot scheme began, the number of smoke detectors installed in the area has increased by 22 per cent. I am urging my local authority, King's Lynn and West Norfolk borough council, to introduce a similar scheme. I know that the central area manager, Mr. Simon Beales, will be extremely sympathetic to my suggestion.

The Norfolk fire brigade is right up there in the vanguard and has recently introduced a community fire safety programme. In due course, it will involve every full-time and retained fireman in Norfolk. That shows the conscientiousness, dedication and commitment of the Norfolk fire brigade. Its campaigns have been extremely successful. I urge other fire services to come up with similar campaigns. The Norfolk fire brigade is continually producing newer and better leaflets that are sent out to householders, developers and to the wardens of different housing complexes. They urge people to spend just a small amount of money installing a smoke detector.

As I said, exemptions should be a matter for the fire authority as well as the local authority. That is why I was slightly concerned and surprised that when my hon. Friend the Member for York was piloting the Bill in its early stages, he did not spot the need to involve the fire authorities. That is why their Lordships tabled the amendment, which insists that the fire authority is consulted.

The House may ask why the amendment provides an exemption for the Isles of Scilly. The fact that their Lordships took special note of the Isles of Scilly may be slightly surprising because the amendment is straightforward, except for the categorical reference to "other than the Council of the Isles of Scilly".

I shall try to cast some light on why that exemption has been made. The council of the Isles of Scilly is a remarkable and long-established example of what many people today would regard as a model for local government in the rest of the country. It is a unitary authority with a single tier. The writ of Cornwall county council does not run in the islands—and nor do the services of Cornwall's county fire brigade. Hon. Members may be interested to know that the chief officer of the Cornish fire service also serves as the chief officer of the fire brigade of the council of the Isles of Scilly, although they are separate roles. When dealing with matters in Cornwall, for example, the chief officer uses the writing paper of the county fire service, but when dealing with matters relating to the Isles of Scilly, he uses the paper of the council of the Isles of Scilly. That is a classic Chinese wall.

The question is whether the inhabitants of the Scilly isles will be disadvantaged by the exemption. If an owner or a builder of a new house on the islands has reason to seek exemption from the requirement to install a smoke detector in the property, he would, under the Bill, have to seek permission from the officers of the council of the Isles of Scilly. Those officers will not be provided with any extra help to ensure that they reach proper decisions about whether to grant an exemption. On the fact of it, builders on the Isles of Scilly might find it harder to obtain exemption. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that.

Exemption could become an important issue on the Isles of Scilly. It would be difficult to conceive a reason why a new house on the isles should be exempted, but the House will know that very few houses are allowed to be built on the islands. Planning laws are, rightly, extremely strict and little new housing has been authorised on the islands over the past 20 years or so. The House will recall that a former Prime Minister, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, used to have a property on the Isles of Scilly and regularly retired there during parliamentary recesses. It is fair to say that Lord Wilson helped to put the Scilly isles on the map. It is unfortunate that he did not have time to contribute to the debates that took place in another place during its consideration of the Bill.

There have been a number of conversions of agricultural buildings on the Isles of Scilly and some of the properties are listed. That raises the question of implementation. Should the installation of smoke detectors in such properties be allowed? It is still not properly defined when the repair on extension of a building will bring it within the scope of the Bill. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that. For those who are engaged on conversions of the sort that are under way on Tresco, the issue remains outstanding.

[Mr. Bellingham]

Could the officers of the council of the Isles of Scilly consult the fire fighters? Each island has a system of retained fireman. Even the smallest island, Bryher—it is only 1·25 miles by 1·25 miles with a population of 76—has access to its own fire service. I am told, however, that house fires are extremely rare and there has not been one in living memory. Perhaps all the houses on the island have been fitted with smoke detectors already.

St. Mary's, the island on which Lord Wilson used to spend his holidays, has a population of 1,600. That population increases substantially in the summer. Like the other islands, it relies on part-time retained fire crews. It is worth saying that such crews are crucial. I have told the House that the Norfolk fire brigade is highly professional and well respected. It relies, however, to a large extent on retained part-time firemen. Those men adopt the highest possible standards of professionalism, training and expertise and they have a commitment and devotion to serving their local community. I pay tribute to the work that is done throughout the country by retained part-time firemen.

There is no doubt that the senior retained men could advise on suitability for exemption, but that would raise a further problem. In the rest of the United Kingdom, the decision whether to exempt will rest with district councils' building inspectors. They will seek the advice of the fire brigade, which will be under the control of the county council. Thus, the advice will come properly from a separate and independent body. On the Isles of Scilly, however, if the council sought the advice of the chief fire officer, wearing the hat or using the notepaper of the Isles of Scilly, it would be seeking advice from itself. That would give rise to accusations of partiality. That is something which those who demand unitary authorities throughout England and Wales might wish to consider. It is worth saying that the debate about the structure of local government will rumble on an on. In the context of the Bill, however, unitary authorities lead to problems when those representing a certain function seek advice and authorisation from another authority. It is an important matter which should be borne in mind.

The only way to avoid the problem would be to summon an independent fire officer from the mainland and from a different force or fire brigade. That, however, would be costly and we must bear in mind the fact that it would add to the cost of new homes on the Isles of Scilly. New homes are needed on the islands for local people, including many in rural areas. It goes without saying that costs are inflated by the distances involved. The sea journey from Penzance to the islands is very expensive and the service operates only from April to early November. The skybus which flies from Land's End operates only in the summer. The only way that a fire officer could visit the islands in the winter would be by helicopter. I understand that the service runs four times a week. Transport between the islands is easier, through the good services offered by the St. Mary's Boatmen's Association.

2 pm

The cost of getting a fire officer from the mainland to the Scilly isles is prohibitive, and there would be a number of important implications for the ratepayers. The independent fire officer might have to spend a few days on the islands because he could not carry out his role in just a morning or an afternoon. It would not be possible to fly from Penzance to St. Mary's, cross to Bryher by boat, and then get back to the air base at St. Mary's in time for the return flight on the same day, even if the fire officer had only one visit to make. Rough weather might intervene and trap the fire inspector on Bryher for several days. Of course, he would not lack creature comforts as I understand that the services offered by local hostelries are superb. I am trying to explain the implications of the additional costs that would be involved; the extra costs involved in island living are already accepted. It would be an economic nonsense to install testing facilities on all five islands.

Will the amendment have an adverse effect on tourism, which is the mainstay of the economy—although 10 years ago, it was daffodils——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been tolerant with the hon. Gentleman, but even he will recognise that he is going too far. He must keep his remarks closer to the amendment.

Mr. Bellingham: I am sorry that you feel that I have strayed too far, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Lords amendment would specifically exempt the Scilly isles and the House must be made aware of the reason.

I hope that I have managed to explain the background to the position in the Scilly isles, which have a special case. That is why the other place decided to exempt them from the provision that requires the fire service to be consulted. On balance, I think that their Lordships were right. I am aware that a number of them lobbied a great deal about the special circumstances of the Scilly isles.

Ensuring that the fire authority is consulted is at the core of the Bill. It has the experts. I have already mentioned the Norfolk fire service, which has a superb record of informing the public and presenting the case for smoke detectors. The fire service has the professionals and the experts and they need to be consulted. I commend the amendment to the House.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I welcome the explanation given by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), who raised two specific issues. The first is whether fire officers should be consulted when existing dwellings or those about to be constructed are to be given exemptions. The second issue is whether the Scilly isles should be exempted.

It is slightly anomalous that the fire service should be consulted when a local authority is considering whether to grant an exemption, but not consulted on whether or where a smoke alarm should be placed. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the fire service has a body of experts who can best advise on the provision of fire appliances and on fire prevention and protection units. It seems odd to draw that distinction. On the one hand, a local authority is deemed to be the right body to determine that the correct number of smoke alarms have been fitted properly, and in the right place, and will serve to give sufficient early warning of a fire. On the other hand, the authority is not deemed competent to decide whether a new or reconstituted dwelling should be exempted. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister or my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West can enlighten me as to why that distinction has been made. It does not seem logical that a local

authority should have the power to act by itself in certain circumstances, but in others cannot be trusted to reach a decision without the intervention of the local fire service.

I was intrigued by the reference to the Scilly Isles. It seems astonishing to exempt them, as I am not aware that the Scillies are less able to provide a fire service check than the many other islands offshore to the United Kingdom mainland. Is there anything special about those isles, as against the Orkneys or Outer Hebrides to the extent that the Scillies alone should be given exemption from what is deemed to be a necessary safeguard in the rest of the United Kingdom?

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West described at length the population of the Scilly isles and said that, in general, they do not have a fire service of adequate strength to undertake the checks required. However, he added that each and every one of the islands —even the smallest—has a resident fire officer. Is there any reason why those officers should not be considered fit and proper persons to undertake the checks required?

As my hon. Friend rightly said, there are few new buildings in the Scillies and the chances of any of them being properly exempted from the provision seems remote. It is a pity that the promoter of the Bill cannot be present, although I fully understand the reason, as I would have enjoyed the opportunity of examining him on precisely how many buildings would fall into the category specifically exempted by the Bill. I will be extremely surprised if at any time in the next five years more than a handful of buildings qualify for the exemption. Is it necessary, therefore, to make such an exemption in respect of the Scilly isles? If the safeguards are thought to be so important for the rest of the United Kingdom, why are they not considered equally important for the Scilly isles?

My hon. Friend mentioned added expense, and there would be additional costs involved in taking over to the isles an officer of the Cornwall fire service, which I understand is the one affiliated to the Scilly isles, to investigate an application for exemption. However, it would be no more expensive than flying someone over to the Mull or Isla, or any of the western isles, where the same criteria must apply. Despite my hon. Friend's admirable introduction to the amendment, I see no reason why the Scillies should be given the exemption that the House is asked to approve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West also raised the question of tourism. I am sure that I would be hauled up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I started talking about daffodils, but the tourist industry is surely the mainstay of the isles' income. The tourists who visit them must be able to expect their safety to be safeguarded there, as in any other part of the United Kingdom. I fail to comprehend why a guest house in the Scillies should be exempted on the basis that the local authority thinks that it should not be required to fit smoke alarms, whereas one in Cornwall will require the consent of the Cornish fire service before it can obtain exemption. We should be wary of legislating for different standards in different parts of the country—the more so when there is no obvious reason why one part should be regarded as different from the others.

I do not intend to block the amendment. The Lords have considered it and they think it appropriate, but I agree to it with great reservations. I see no good reason for exemption for the Isles of Scilly, although the Minister may be able to provide an explanation.

Mr. Stern: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) I found that the introduction to the Lords amendment by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) gave rise to one or two doubts.

In theory we are all against unnecessary legislation and I wonder how necessary this amendment is. It would provide an exemption from the requirement to put smoke detectors in new dwellings. I should have thought that any local authority faced with a request for such an exemption would automatically consult the local fire authority, so do we really need a legislative requirement to do so? Surely the same clause to which the amendment refers provides the opportunity for local authorities to do this. If they refuse an application for exemption there is a right of appeal and, inevitably, the evidence that would be called for during that appeal would be given by the local fire authority. I am not sure whether there is a need to include a legislative provision to this end. I hope that one of my hon. Friends will be able to reassure me on that point.

In many parts of the country there will be unitary authorities. In my part of the world it is likely that either the city of Bristol or Avon county council will cease to exist as a local authority in five years' time. So why do we need a provision stipulating that one part of a local authority must consult another to achieve the aim of the Bill? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster, I have no intention of blocking the amendment, but it leaves me worried.

Mr. Yeo: This has been a helpful debate in which important issues have been aired. The introduction to the amendment by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) was a classic of its kind: he explained the matter most clearly. He also took the opportunity to describe the excellent work of the Norfolk fire service, which I commend. It has already had some success with a higher than average rate of installations of smoke detectors.

My hon. Friend asked important questions about the Scilly isles. The amendment deals with exceptions to the general run of things. It is expected that after the passage of the Bill almost all new dwellings will be covered by the requirement to install smoke detectors, so this aspect of the Bill deals with only a small number of cases. I recently saw the structure plan for the isles of Scilly—it is something of an anomaly that it has to have one, given its very small population. Without breaking any confidences I think that I can say that under that structure plan it does not appear that the Bill will have a huge impact, because the number of new dwellings to be built in the Scilly isles in the next few years is relatively small, so it is possible that there will be no exceptions of the sort dealt with by the clause.

The issues were further illuminated by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). It might be best if we monitor the progress of the legislation in the Isles of Scilly by getting my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) to keep an eye on the situation. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West will ask him to do that.

The nub of the matter is that the local authority and the fire authority are one and the same body on the Isles of Scilly. That is unique. It does not apply to the parts of western Scotland that were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster. That fact is the explanation

[Mr. Yeo]

for the amendment. The amendment does not extend its requirements to the Isles of Scilly because the local authority and the fire authority are the same body.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful for that explanation. I accept that that is the difference between the Isles of Scilly and the outer isles around Scotland—one of which I was not aware. However, that in itself does not seem to be a good reason for the exemption. First, as my hon. Friend said, this is unlikely to have any effect on the Isles of Scilly. Secondly, although it is one and the same authority on the Isles of Scilly, there is a specialist fire service officer there who must be perfectly capable of making the sort of decisions that fire authorities in other parts of the country have to make. It is something of an insult to the specialist fire service officer on the Isles of Scilly that that power should be removed from him.

2.15 pm

Mr. Yeo: It may be some time since the affairs of the Isles of Scilly have been discussed in such detail in the House. It is possible, therefore, that the attention of the population of the Isles of Scilly will be drawn to our proceedings. I hope that, on the ground, common sense will prevail. If there is the need for a Chinese wall to be erected, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West, I am sure that the authority is capable of erecting one. In practice, therefore, I hope that the anxiety expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster will not prove to be a real anxiety, if the situation unfolds as he suggested.

Amendment No. 2 allows the appropriate local authority to dispense with or relax the requirement to fit smoke detectors. There are unlikely to be many situations in which the power will need to be used. The conversion of an historic house into a dwelling is a possible example, but when such a situation does arise it seems sensible to require the building control authority to consult the fire authority before deciding whether to give a direction under clause 2. The amendment will ensure that consultation takes place. It would remove any chance of a local authority deciding, for one reason or another, to cut corners. It would have to consult another body before this dispensation could be granted.

Against that background, the amendment commands the full support of the Government. Therefore, I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 4 agreed to.

Hare Coursing Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

HARE COURSING TO BE ILLEGAL

2.17 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 5, after 'person', insert 'wilfully'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments:

No. 3, in page 1, line 5, leave out 'procures'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 5, leave out 'or assists at'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 5, leave out 'or suffers'.

No. 13, in page 1, line 6, leave out 'two' and insert 'one'.

No. 16, in page 1, line 7, leave out 'in a competition as to their ability to course hares'.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The amendments have been put together in a package and would amend clause 1 in various ways, through which I shall briefly lead the House.

Amendment No.1 would insert the word "wilfully" after "person" in line 5. The clause would then read:

"If any person wilfully causes, procures or assists at, or knowingly permits"

and so on. The reason for the insertion of the word "wilfully" is that the question of when someone causes a dog to course a hare is much too wide. Both I and those of my hon. Friends who joined me in tabling the amendment believe that it is important that someone should do so wilfully. In other words, they should have the intention of doing the act that the Bill seeks to prevent before any criminal act can be deemed to have been committed.

It appears that, at the moment, anybody who is out with a dog, or with two dogs, who permits or causes that dog or those dogs to course a hare in the way defined by clause 1 would be guilty of an offence. That person might cause the dogs to do so without intending that that should be the consequence of his actions. For example, he may be walking his two dogs through a field in which there are hares. If his dogs decided to course a hare, it would be possible to argue that he caused the hare to be coursed by the two dogs because he had taken the dogs into that field and released them, after which they had coursed the hare. However, he may not necessarily have intended that they should do so.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will have no difficulty in agreeing with that amendment and that he would not wish to cause somebody who was not acting deliberately to commit a criminal offence. I very much hope, therefore, that he will agree to the amendment.

Amendment No. 2 goes to the heart of the Bill. A quick reading makes it clear that the Bill does not prohibit hare coursing where the object is to catch the hare. Only coursing where the object is to test dogs is to be abolished. That form of coursing is regulated by the National Coursing Club to ensure fair play.

As a supporter of coursing, it is odd that I am moving an amendment that would help the hon. Member for Leyton. However, logic insists that I do so, because under the present ludicrous state of affairs if somebody courses

a hare with two dogs in a competition to test the dogs' ability to course hares he commits a criminal offence, but if he courses with the intention of killing the hare he does not do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must draw it to the hon. Gentleman's attention that amendment No. 2 is not included in the group. It is out of order.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am afraid that that fact escaped me when I compiled my notes. I hope that I am right in thinking that amendment No. 3 is in the group.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Thank you, Sir.

It will be an offence not only to cause coursing—or, as I hope, after the Bill has been amended, "wilfully" to cause coursing—but to procure it. According to the "Oxford English Dictionary", "procure" can mean to take care for, take care of, attend to or look after. Alternatively, it can mean to put forth, employ care or effort, to do one's best, to endeavour, labour or to contrive or devise with care, to bring about by care or pains, to bring about, to cause, effect, produce, to obtain by care or effort, to gain, win, get possession of or acquire. Clearly the word "procure" has a wide range of different meanings which could lead to substantial confusion in the Bill. I do not think that it would be in anybody's interests that there should be less than clarity in the way in which the Bill sets a new criminal offence.

Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) said, the word "procure" is otiose as the word "causes" appears earlier in the sentence. In the context of the supposed meaning of "procures" in the clause, "causes" or "procures" seem to mean the same. Therefore, the word adds nothing to the clause and it has many irrelevant meanings that could throw a cloud of uncertainty around the Bill if it were unamended. It must be in the interests of clarity and of the Bill that that word is omitted, particularly when "wilfully causes" embraces everything that the hon. Member for Leyton is seeking to achieve.

I gather that the word "procures" was originally included in the Hare Coursing Bill, which was a Government Bill, but was deleted in Committee. I am sure that the hon. Member for Leyton would wish to follow the example of Dr. Shirley Summerskill, who saw the logic of the argument that I am advancing, although it was probably advanced more strongly than I am advancing my argument today. In 1975, the Labour party was prepared to accept the deletion of the word "procures", and I can see no good reason for including it today.

I am slightly nervous that the list that I have is not the correct one, but I hope that amendment No. 4 is in this group.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Yes.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: If amendment No. 4 and all my other amendments were accepted the clause would read:

"If any person wilfully causes, or knowingly permits or suffers any place to be used for, the coursing of a hare by two or more dogs in a competition as to their ability to course hares, he shall be guilty of an offence".

I do not believe that the "or assists at" adds anything to the clause as it would read if my amendments were accepted. If someone knowingly permits or suffers something to happen, or if he assists at something, he is clearly knowingly permitting or suffering it to occur. Furthermore, if a man sets his dogs on to a hare and starts to judge them he would then be committing an offence. The question then arises, who are his assistants? Do they know that that is the purpose for which he is letting the dogs go? That seems to go to the heart of the Bill's inadequacy. It will clearly not achieve what the hon. Member for Leyton wishes it to achieve, which is the prevention of hare coursing as we know it.

Mr. Bellingham: Although I sympathise with and respect the campagin waged by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), he is misguided. If the Bill were passed it would encourage the form of illegal hare coursing which does so much to destroy wildlife and the countryside. People would arrive illegally on the land and let their dogs out to course at night without the permission of the landowner. As a result, many more hares would be killed and there would be a great deal of destruction of the local environment. That is exactly what would happen if the Bill became law, so, although we respect the motives and the campaign of the hon. Member for Leyton, our advice to him would be to spend some time in the countryside finding out how it works. He should attend a hare coursing meeting, and I am prepared to invite him to my part of the world to show him at first hand the damage that would be done by illegal hare coursing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I hope that the hon. Member for Leyton will accept the offer of hospitality from my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham). Norfolk is a lovely county. It is full of hares and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will go and see it.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the great scourges of our countryside at the moment is the people who go hare coursing illegally, usually with lurcher dogs, usually in the middle of the night and always against the wishes of the landlord. In Hertfordshire, especially—*[Interruption.]* I wish that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) would stop interrupting.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I have not started yet.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he has not started yet, he is mistaken. He is making a confounded nuisance of himself from a sedentary position which is only mildly preferable to the nuisance that he makes of himself when he stands up.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that he is not trying, yet again, to prevent an hon. Member who has the support of the House from getting a Bill passed to protect wild animals from bloodthirsty louts who participate in blood sports?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I have no intention of allowing on to the statute book a Bill that does not have the support of most hon. Members, most of my constituents or most people in the country.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): My hon. Friend was talking about bloodthirsty louts who course in the middle of the night.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I was, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend. They come in all shapes, sizes and guises and even sometimes halfway through the day. The people to whom I referred and who have been coursing lurchers in the middle of the night in Hertfordshire are extremely dangerous. They are thugs and they are dangerous to the landowners, their gamekeepers and anyone else who gets in their way. I know of instances where they have threatened and badly beaten people who have tried to stop their illegal activities.

If the hon. Member for Leyton is keen to stop something that is against the interests of the countryside and certainly against those of the hare, he should join me in asking for much stronger penalties for such illegal activities instead of attacking the legal hare coursing which takes place under the rules of the National Coursing Club and which, as we said in Committee and earlier, is a pastime enjoyed by many people and in which few hares are killed. It is a sport of great skill whereby the dogs are pitted against each other. Such activity is legal and should remain legal. It gives a great deal of pleasure to many people who live in and understand the ways of the countryside.

It is extraordinary that Opposition Members can never realise the link between country sports and conservation. They should realise that they cannot have the countryside that they and their constituents enjoy unless they allow the people who live in it to live as they have for centuries and to continue the practices of centuries which are necessary to maintain the balance of nature. It is the activities of Opposition Members and certainly not——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

To be further considered on Friday 12 July.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE (EXTENSION OF POWERS BILL)

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Not moved.

PUBLIC SERVICE CONTRACT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker Not moved.

RAILWAY RE-OPENINGS (TRIBUNAL) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Disgraceful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Adley: The next disgraceful Friday, Sir.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

MISUSE OF DRUGS (ANABOLIC STEROIDS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 July.

SPECIAL CONSTABLES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

VETERANS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 July.

ESTABLISHED CHURCH BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELITIS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

YOUNG PERSONS (ALCOHOL ABUSE) ETC. BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Cox: With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

NATIONAL ENTERPRISE (RECONSTRUCTION) BOARD BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

GARDEN SUPPLIES (SUNDAY TRADING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

EMPLOYMENT (UPPER AGE LIMITS IN ADVERTISEMENTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION (GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS HEADQUARTERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

ABOLITION OF POLITICAL HONOURS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (TOBACCO SMOKING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BRITISH NATIONALITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ABOLITION OF WARRANT SALES (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WELFARE OF CALVES (EXPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

EDUCATION (SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LICENSING OF TICKET SALES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 19 July.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 July.

ABOLITION OF DEER HUNTING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I did not hear anyone object, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I suppose it must have been one of the unspeakable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

COHABITATION (CONTRACT ENFORCEMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

RIVER SAFETY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MARINE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EDUCATION PROVISION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

PET ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

GAMING (BINGO) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCILS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

FORESTRY COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

TRADE DESCRIPTIONS (ANIMAL TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

PARISH COUNCILS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

COAL IMPORTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On behalf of 5 million pensioners, I beg to move——

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

HEALTH CARE OF PRISONERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN ACT 1973 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): With the agreement of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Tony Banks: As before, Sir.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

GREYHOUND BETTING LEVY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

VAGRANCY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): With permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Sir, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

MEDICAL QUALIFICATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. *—[Sir G. Vaughan.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must point out that Mr. Speaker has on a number of occasions made it clear that he deprecates the practice of taking the Committee stage without adequate notice. However, there is nothing that I can do to stop it.

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): Notification was given, I understand.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading) and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

COMMUNITY CHARGE (DISQUALIFICATION FOR NON-PAYMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 July.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Sir, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

MINISTERS OF THE CROWN (FINANCIAL INTEREST) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

RIGHTS OF ACCESS TO NEIGHBOURING LAND BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Ward.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I repeat the deprecatory words of Mr. Speaker, of which I reminded the House earlier.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading) and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

SUNDAY ENTERTAINMENTS (VIDEO SUPPLY) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT (INSPECTIONS) BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 9th July, the Motion in the name of Mr. John MacGregor relating to Sittings of the House may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later and, if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Questions necessary to dispose of them, including the Questions on any Amendments to the said Motion which he may have selected which may then be moved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken.

Ordered,

That, if the British Railways Board (Finance) Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed; and that as soon as the proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on British Railways Board (Finance) Bill [Money] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD (FINANCE) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Hospital Admissions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

2.40 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the case of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and of the Parkside health authority. On 15 August 1990 my constituent, Ian Brown, wrote to me saying that his wife had been the victim of a medical accident at Charing Cross hospital, which is in the Riverside district health authority area. That accident resulted in severe scarring of Mrs. Brown's right arm and restricted use amounting to disability. It is not the purpose of this debate to go into the details of the accident; that is a matter for attention elsewhere and I do not intend to refer to it further.

What happened afterwards is, however, a matter for this debate and it is a matter on which I seek some answers from the Minister. A number of corrective operations were to be carried out on Mrs. Brown. One operation was carried out, and helped to ameliorate the immediate problem to give more time for further repair work to be carried out which would deal with the worst of the scarring and improve the functioning of the arm to some extent. The corrective surgery was to be done at St. Mary's hospital in the Parkside health authority area.

Four attempts have been made to carry out that operation and all four have been cancelled. The first was due in autumn 1990. Then, in December 1990, the second operation was cancelled. To set my remarks in context, I should explain that all the operations were cancelled at the very last moment. Mrs. Brown and her husband prepared themselves for her admission to hospital for an important operation—of particular relevance because the NHS had created the problem, albeit by accident, in the first place —and Mrs. Brown was emotionally ready to go into hospital, only to discover on the day itself or the previous day that the operation had been cancelled.

After the second cancellation I wrote to Neil Goodwin, general manager of St. Mary's hospital. I quote from his reply of 17 January 1991 because he puts the problem in context. He wrote:

"The poor availability of beds for booked admissions was as a result of a greater than expected number of admissions being accepted via the Accident and Emergency department who must take priority and whose number cannot be accurately predicted. This unfortunately resulted in the cancellation of some of the elective admissions.

Five elective orthopaedic admissions were scheduled for 12 December 1990. Of these two had malignancies of the bone, two were booked for total hip replacements and the fifth was Mrs. Brown.

All patients scheduled for admission are assigned a priority and, on this occasion with only two beds available for elective admissions, the bone malignancy patients were admitted.

With regard to future admissions for Mrs. Brown, I am pleased to inform you that from 7 January an additional 14 orthopaedic beds will be opened and, since she has been cancelled more than once, she will be given priority as an elective admission."

Needless to say, those last words are relevant to the rest of my comments.

Mrs. Brown's next appointment was for 13 March 1991. Again, it was cancelled because of a lack of beds. Mr. Brown then tried to have his wife transferred to a hospital list outside London, although he and his wife were

[Mr. Clive Soley]

obviously upset at having to do that given that they felt that the accident had taken place as a result of an NHS operation in the first instance.

On 9 April I wrote to the Minister for Health saying that the operation had been cancelled and I was told in what I understand was a verbal statement that there was little prospect of treatment at St. Mary's. On 7 May I received a reply from Baroness Hooper saying that she had passed the letter to Michael Hatfield, chair of Parkside health authority.

This is one of the most important complaints that I have on behalf of my constituents. When we encounter such a problem, which is clearly one of underfunding of bed spaces, traditionally and quite appropriately hon. Members can write to the Minister who must answer to the House for the state of the health service. However, consistently over the past few years, hon. Members—myself included—have found that their letters have been passed on with a one paragraph sentence from the Minister claiming that it is a matter for the health authority. In other words, the Minister avoids having to answer the key question and the buck is passed to the local health authority.

Michael Hatfield wrote to me on 13 May 1991 saying:

"It is obviously highly regrettable that Mrs. Brown's surgery has had to be cancelled on several occasions. Every effort is made to ensure that patients previously cancelled are given priority admission".

One could forgive Mr. and Mrs. Brown thinking that that priority admission was not happening. Mr. Hatfield continued:

"however bed availability remains subject to the number of emergency admissions, which must always take precedence over less urgent treatment. St. Mary's currently has an extra 12-20 emergency admission patients occupying medical beds as a result of increased demands on their emergency care service, and this unfortunately does compound the problem.

There are indeed plans to open a 14-bed day ward at St. Mary's in the next few months which will provide facilities for orthopaedic surgery. This will be very valuable in helping to reduce the number of orthopaedic cancellations, and as the revision of Mrs. Brown's scar could very easily be undertaken as a day case, the consultant in charge of her case would consider it suitable for this facility."

The chairman of the health authority is clearly claiming that the problem is a shortage of beds. A new admission date was given, this time for 19 June 1991—just under a month ago—but again it was cancelled, and again the reason was lack of beds.

I should like to go back to the 50th report of the Public Accounts Committee on the use of operating theatres in the national health service. The Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), produced a useful report which was widely welcomed by many people. It gave a helpful description of the problems and of what should be done about them. The chairman of the theatre sub-committee of St. Mary's hospital, the hospital which we are discussing today, wrote to my right hon. Friend—I shall let the Minister have a copy of that letter in due course because I am not sure of the procedures or whether he will be able to get one from the PAC—stating:

"I think it is clear from those two tables that the chief reason for cancellation of operating sessions is lack of availability of beds and that not one session was cancelled"—I emphasise "not one"—

"for lack of medical staff during the period studied."

The relevant period covered eight months in 1988. The letter continued:

"It also seems that a chief reason for cancellation, at very short notice, of admission of patients for planned operations was that there was no bed available for them, that bed being occupied by another acutely ill patient . . .

The report from your Committee does show concern about the provision of service of patients admitted through the Accident and Emergency Department and this concern is shared by many of us who feel that the provision of emergency services in this country is not as it should be. It seems to me that the distinction between emergency and elective work is over-simplified. I think it best to regard emergency admissions as those in which life is threatened and which required treatment or operations within hours. Next, inevitable cases where operation must be done within twenty-four to forty-eight hours and a good deal of fracture work comes into this group and finally, those cases where admission is truly elective and can be planned well in advance."

I certainly do not take the view—I am sure that Mr. and Mrs. Brown would not do so either—that an accident and emergency admission should not be given priority over Mrs. Brown's operation. That is not what is central to this argument. It is not a matter of Mrs. Brown's operation being postponed because of a greater emergency, but of insufficient beds being available when there are sufficient surgeons and sufficient theatre time to carry out both the emergency surgery and the elective surgery of the type that Mrs. Brown needed—and needed as a result of an NHS accident in the first place.

The figures attached to the report sent to me and to the Public Accounts Committee show that in April 1988 a total of 81 beds were not available to surgical patients, and that 60 planned surgical admissions were cancelled. The number of beds not available for surgical patients varies from the low figure of 15 to a cancellation rate of 105. Perhaps more relevantly, the overwhelming reason for the cancellation of theatre sessions is given as a lack of beds. In April 1988, 27 operations were cancelled because of a lack of beds; in May, the figure was 17; in June, 30; in July, seven; in August, 21; in September, 19; in October, 36; in November, 36; and in December, 25. I am told that the position has probably worsened since then.

It is interesting that very few cancellations were made for other reasons. Statutory holidays probably accounted for the next biggest cause of cancellations. Another reason sometimes given for cancellations is that the patient does not turn up, but the figures show that there were never more than seven such cancellations and usually only one or two. There is no example of an operation not being carried out because no surgeon or anaesthetist was available. In other words, the operations could have taken place if the beds had been available. Bed availability is fundamental to the debate.

I am not using the opportunity to raise these matters as a way of knocking the Government's running of the health service. None the less, I think that the Government run it badly. We all know the general view of the public on the issue. I am here to speak for Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and specifically for Mrs. Brown, who suffered from the accident to which I have referred. If more beds were available at St. Mary's hospital, the operation could have been performed.

I asked someone at St. Mary's hospital—someone in a position to know—how many beds would be needed, and whether as many as 100 beds would be needed. I was told that the number would probably be significantly less than that. The staff and the necessary operating theatres are available, so why can we not provide sufficient beds—

perhaps another 30 or 40, possibly fewer, I am not in a position to know—to enable an operation to take place on Mrs. Brown's arm and to permit the many similar operations which in the past have not been performed, thereby causing the sort of distress and anger that Mr. and Mrs. Brown have experienced. We know from the figures of 1988 that the number must be considerable.

People prepare themselves emotionally and physically for operations, whatever those operations may be. In Mrs. Brown's case, it will be a restorative operation on her arm. People make themselves ready to go into hospital, only to be told at the very last moment that the operation cannot take place because a bed is not available. Other arguments can be advanced. For example, if the Government had accepted the no-fault compensation Bill—the National Health Service (Compensation) Bill—that might have helped Mr. and Mrs. Brown, who are caught up in what is for them a personal nightmare.

My central question for the Minister is directed to bed availability. Why cannot additional beds be provided in a hospital such as St. Mary's? No one is arguing that the hospital needs hugely increased resources for additional surgeons and operating theatres—it merely needs additional beds to enable it to carry out elective surgery so that no one has to suffer four cancellations in one year. Indeed, it is still not known, and cannot be known, when Mrs. Brown's operation will be carried out. For all I know, she might be in the same position 12 months from now. That must be deeply unsatisfactory and deeply distressing to Mr. and Mrs. Brown. I hope that the Minister will address himself to these matters.

2.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has raised an issue which perhaps can be debated at two levels. First, there is the case of Mrs. Brown and, secondly, there is the issue that is illustrated by her sad and unacceptable position.

I shall begin by dealing with Mrs. Brown's specific case. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith said, for the purposes of the debate we need not concern ourselves directly with how she came to need the treatment that she now requires, which is being discussed in the context of St. Mary's hospital. In the context of the debate, the salient points are clear. Mrs. Brown was referred to St. Mary's to receive treatment that she clearly needs. I saw photographs of her on the lunchtime news on television and no one would dispute that she needs treatment and is entitled to receive it from the national health service if it is possible to improve the condition of her arm.

Mrs. Brown was referred to St. Mary's to receive treatment. On four occasions she expected to be admitted to receive it and on four occasions there were cancellations. That is the issue which the hon. Gentleman raised and he has sought to expand it into a discussion of bed availability, which he sees as the principal cause of cancelled operations.

The hon. Gentleman quoted a letter from Parkside health authority. It is important that it should be clearly on record that the unit general manager of St. Mary's has offered his apologies to Mr. and Mrs. Brown for the delay in Mrs. Brown's treatment, and an admission that the management of her treatment in hospital is not such as to satisfy the hospital managers. His apologies and admission do not treat Mrs. Brown, but they make it clear that no one thinks that the record is satisfactory.

I shall go a stage further and say that the Government wish to state clearly that repeated cancellations, even of non-urgent admissions to hospital, are not regarded by us as an acceptable managerial technique. Some cancellations are the inevitable consequence of a commitment to use national health service resources effectively.

It would be unrealistic for any Minister or Government to give an undertaking that there will never be a cancellation of a non-urgent admission. However, repeated cancellations for the same patient are not acceptable and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government do not regard that as acceptable. The records of individual NHS hospitals on repeated cancellations for the same patient requiring non-urgent treatment is one of the measures of the quality of health care delivered by a particular hospital and we look to health authorities to measure and monitor that through the contracting system.

It is important that the House understands why non-urgent admissions inevitably will be cancelled on occasions if we are to maintain our commitment—which I believe is shared across the House—to use the resources available to the NHS as effectively as possible. Non-urgent admissions are planned into a hospital's programme as and when beds and other resources become available. It is important not to regard beds as the only resource; they are one of many resources available to a hospital, all of which must be marshalled to treat a particular patient. There is no magic about beds——

Mr. Soley: I understand the Minister's point in general, but my understanding of this case is that the problem is specifically a lack of beds.

Mr. Dorrell: We must examine why, sometimes, beds are cited as the reason for a particular operation not being carried out. Bed unavailability can be caused by a number of factors. It can be because of emergency admissions—the example cited by the hon. Gentleman—or it can be because of an unexpected length of stay required by an existing patient. It is not just the admissions that determine bed availability, but whether a patient is discharged from hospital within a reasonably expected time. It involves the patient load in a hospital at any one time.

Bed availability is also affected by staff availability. There may be an epidemic in winter months and hospital staff—like staff in any organisation—are susceptible to illness. Often we are told that operations are cancelled because beds are not available, but the reason could be that there have been too many admissions for the bed capacity or because there have been too few discharges. It could also be that there is an inadequate number of people to staff all the physical beds in a hospital, "Beds" is simply a useful tag to hang on all those different sets of circumstances that can lead to a bed space not being available at the time that the patient needs it for a non-urgent admission.

Mr. Soley: I must press the point. Mr. Hatfield said that the problem was caused by emergency admissions. In his letter he said that

"bed availability remains subject to the number of emergency admissions, which must always take precedence over less urgent treatment."

[Mr. Soley]

I understand that argument. The case that I have raised relates not to patients having to stay longer than expected in hospital, but to emergency admissions.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman must think about the position of a hospital manager. He may want to admit Mrs. Brown or another patient for non-urgent treatment in the following week. In order to tell Mrs. Brown that that treatment will be possible, he must ask, first, whether the necessary number of staff are available to give Mrs. Brown the treatment that she needs. The second question that he must ask himself is whether a bed will be available. He must make a judgment about the number of beds needed for emergency admissions and in the case in question, that factor may have been underestimated. He must also estimate the rates of patient discharge, because over a given period, a hospital will discharge as many patients as it admits.

Mr. Soley: If we are arguing a general case, I would agree with the Minister, but in the case in question, beds were unavailable as a result of emergency admissions. There is no suggestion by anyone, anywhere, that insufficient staff were available to undertake the operation. I have been clearly told that if the extra bed had been available, the operation would have been done regardless of other emergency operations—and that they, too, would have been performed.

Mr. Dorrell: I was seeking to analyse the different factors that lead to cancellations in general. It seems that the variable underestimated in that instance was the extent of emergency admissions, but the following day it could have been one of the other variables. Bed availability could have been quoted as the factor in any of the three instances, arising from different underlying factors.

It is not necessarily right to conclude that all problems can be solved by increasing bed space. However, it must be said that St. Mary's management, in order to meet the contract standards required by its health authority since 1 April, concluded that the hospital's bed space is inadequate. Although the chairman's letter said that the committee was then proposing to commission an additional 14 beds, it intends over the next few weeks to commission a further 20 beds. Bed capacity must be regarded by any sensible manager as a resource element, but the important question is not how many beds or doctors are at his disposal but the quality of service provided to patients.

Mr. Soley *rose*——

Mr. Dorrell: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman three times and I want to move on to echo one of the themes that he sought to develop.

The Government do not apologise for pressing home their policy that NHS hospitals must use their cash as effectively as possible. There should be a clear steer to all health service managers that they are expected to use all their resources—beds, clinical skills and staff—as effectively as possible. However, I reiterate that the Government do not regard repeated non-urgent cancellations as an acceptable managerial practice. However, efficiency and effectiveness are not purely accounting concepts and the optimum use of resources tends to lead to cancellations for the reasons that I explained—although the hon. Gentleman may not accept that argument in respect of his specific constituency case.

We must ensure that all health service hospitals match high standards of service as well as keeping within narrow measurements of cost efficiency. Under the contracting service that we put in place on 1 April, we require health authorities to speak to provider units, and particularly to hospitals, to agree standards of service that the authorities, using health service resources, expect their hospitals to provide to the patients on whose behalf the authorities purchase the service.

One of the standards of an acceptable service should be a limit on the number of times—apart from in exceptional circumstances—a hospital should be allowed to cancel non-urgent admissions. The new purchasing function of the health authorities should be used, through the contracting system, to limit this type of management action by health service hospitals even though it arises from an entirely laudable commitment to using the resources of the health service as efficiently as humanly possible. Sometimes in their enthusiasm to do that there is a danger that managers do not adequately consider other vital quality factors from the point of view of the patient.

The hon. Gentleman was right to invite the House to dwell for a moment on the plight of his constituent, who four times prepared herself to come into hospital and four times—on the same day or immediately before it—found her operation cancelled. To secure the efficient use of resources, once or twice is perhaps unavoidable, but repeated cancellations should be deprecated and limited—and we look to health authorities to do that. We have given them the weapon, in the contracting system, to limit such occasions and to insist that provider units—hospitals—are held to account and given management objectives not only of cost efficiency but of improving the quality of service, so that NHS patients in future will not have to suffer the sort of treatment that Mrs. Brown has suffered in the past few months.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 8 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Tourism

1. **Mr. Grist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends holding a meeting with the chairman of the tourist board for Wales to discuss problems with tourism.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): My right hon. Friend frequently meets the chairman of the Wales tourist board. The next occasion will be on Monday 15 July.

Mr. Grist: May I urge my right hon. Friend on that occasion, and on others when suitable, to support the chairman's efforts vastly to improve the number, availability, cleanliness and visibility of public conveniences, the lack of which is a public disgrace?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I know that my hon. Friend has had correspondence on this subject with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend will know that under the Public Health Act 1936, responsibility lies with local authorities which have the discretion about where and when to provide these facilities. We are certainly prepared to take the matter up with the chairman of the tourist board.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Why is the Wales tourist board denied the right to advertise Wales, its people, culture and scenic beauty independently overseas?

Sir Wyn Roberts: That was considered, but the hon. Gentleman will know that prime responsibility for attracting visitors to Britain lies with the British Tourist Authority. The Wales tourist board works closely with the BTA, and a report was recently commissioned on how the whole operation could be improved. I am glad to say that the report has now been received and that it envisages progress being made over the next three years. We should not underestimate the benefit that we get from using BTA facilities overseas.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Minister appreciate that visitors are being sent to Scotland, London, Oxford and Stratford, but have never heard of Wales? Under the present arrangements they are never likely to.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. If he visits any BTA offices abroad, he will see that Wales is prominently presented. Of course, there is no accounting for foreigners' ignorance of Wales or of any other part of the United Kingdom.

Further Education for the Deaf

2. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the provision of further education for the deaf in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Twenty-one colleges of further education in Wales make provision for students with special needs, including partially or profoundly deaf students. During the 1989-90 session, 35 students with a specific hearing impairment were studying in Welsh colleges.

Mr. Raffan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that places for the deaf at colleges of further education must be backed by a team of professionals who can cater for the full range of communication and linguistic needs of their students, and that even that is no substitute for a college that caters specifically for the deaf within a supportive and signing environment, such as Doncaster college for the deaf?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that, under grants for education support and training, funds are available to meet the cost of in-service training for further education staff who teach students with special educational needs, including deaf students. Some £50,000 is available for this purpose in the current financial year, and further support will be available in 1992-93. Our White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" states that the new further education funding council will be placed under a duty to secure provision for students with special educational needs.

Mr. Win Griffiths: May I draw to the Minister's attention the fact that the money available at colleges of further education to cater properly for deaf students and other students with special educational needs is totally inadequate? There are cases at the college of technology in Bridgend where it looks as though students will be unable to benefit from the courses, simply because of the additional expense of making sure that they can take the courses. I ask the Minister to look into this matter urgently and to provide the money needed.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Mid Glamorgan certainly takes a substantial share of that £50,000—£11,150 to be precise. I must stress the reply that I gave: 21 out of the 31 colleges of further education provide for students with special educational needs.

Defective Housing

3. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with Swansea city council and tenants on the nature of the tenancy and rent levels following the redevelopment of pre-cast reinforced concrete houses in Blaenymaes-Portmead and Clase estates in the city.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): These are matters for consultation between Swansea city council and the tenants.

Mr. Anderson: The Under-Secretary of State will know that the tenants were most grateful to the Secretary of State for his readiness to see them this morning. However, they were intensely dissapointed by the lack of specific financial commitments and the apparent unwillingness to recognise the urgency and exceptional nature of the problem that faces the city. Tenants in Orlit houses are seeing their houses crumbling around them and regard them as a fire risk. Will the Under-Secretary of State consult Tai Cymru to make sure that rents are not pitched at such a level that tenancies are effectively available only to those on housing benefit? Will he also devise a formula so that the land that the city council is giving free to Tai Cymru can be taken into account in reducing rents to levels that can be afforded?

Mr. Bennett: Housing associations have a policy of setting affordable rents. It is for the housing benefit system to deal with people who are in need. Therefore, I do not accept that we ought to adjust housing association grants in this respect.

Mr. Alan Williams: Does the Under-Secretary of State recognise that the policy that he prefers means that for the next four or five years all the new housing that might be built by Tai Cymru in Swansea will be used not to reduce the housing list queue, but to provide homes for those who live in houses that will have to be demolished? In that context, and in view of the length of the housing list, does the Under-Secretary of State recognise that this, in Swansea terms, is a housing disaster which requires special financial provision?

Mr. Bennett: As I said in answer to questions at the last but one Question Time, we gave Swansea city council all that it asked for when it came to Orlit houses. I said at the time that we would sympathetically consider in coming years any further requests that were made. This year Tai Cymru is giving £9 million towards housing in Swansea. The right hon. Gentleman knows that we had a meeting about that this morning. We shall write to him further on the subject.

Hospital Reorganisation

4. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to meet the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority to discuss hospital reorganisations.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We have no plans at present to meet the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority to discuss this matter.

Mr. Morgan: Now that the South Glamorgan health authority seems, on the quiet, to have dropped its proposals for a £70 million third district general hospital in South Glamorgan, what influence will that have on the Minister's decision regarding the proposal to expand the treatment centre at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar, in my constituency which, if it were given half a chance by the Minister, would eliminate the waiting list for artificial knees and hips, and carry out up to 1,000 operations a year for the very small capital expenditure of £160,000, instead of the 250 operations that it carries out now?

Mr. Bennett: I understand that the South Glamorgan health authority is reviewing the need for a third district hospital, but that it has not yet come to a decision. I shall make decisions on treatment centres and other matters in the light of that decision, when it is made.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Does not the Under-Secretary of State accept my hon. Friend's contention that it is a disgrace that the specialist treatment centre at Rhydlafar hospital has already used up its quota for knee operations this year? It is also close to its limit of 160 hip replacements per year. Is not there a desperate need for extra funding, so that the number of operations performed there can be increased, to make that a superb regional orthopaedic centre?

Mr. Bennett: I am always interested in improving the productivity of treatment centres and I am happy at the way that they have functioned. They have reached the target set for them. Clearly, we shall have to consider future allocations of waiting list money, but I can give no guarantee about that aspect at present. It is for district health authorities to reach agreement with treatment centres on the number of patients that are treated at any particular centre.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Is it not desirable, in general terms and particularly in respect of the issue in question, to deal in facts? Can my hon. Friend say how much health spending increased in South Glamorgan over the past 10 or 12 years and what that has meant for improving the quality of patient care?

Mr. Bennett: In 1979, South Glamorgan health authority received in cash terms £59 million, compared with £180 million this year. That represents a 30 per cent. increase in real terms, after taking inflation into account. As to figures for the Welsh health service, there has been a 36 per cent. increase in the number of in-patients treated, a 29 per cent. increase in out-patients and a 200 per cent. increase in day surgery. Under the Labour Government, the number of out-patients fell.

Patient Care Targets

5. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the patient care targets which he has given to the health service in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: After consultation with directors of public health medicine, preliminary targets of each of our 10 health gain priority areas have been issued to the service to inform the development of local strategies for health.

Mr. Michael: Will not the Under-Secretary of State accept something that is obvious to everyone else in the health service—that the Government are not setting targets but merely describing health changes predicted in the normal course of events, without providing any new resources or fresh initiatives? Will he face the fact that the way to set and to meet real and meaningful improved health targets in Wales is in partnership with doctors, nurses, health visitors, community health councils and everyone else involved? Will he, as a first step, withdraw the Government's divisive plans for hospital opt-outs and end the crazy experiment in creating a so-called market for health care in Wales?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is the last person still to believe that anything in the reforms is about hospitals opting out. They do not; they remain NHS trust hospitals, paid for out of the generality of taxation and free at the point of service to patients.

Mr. Barry Jones: Nonsense.

Mr. Bennett: There is no use the hon. Gentleman shouting "Nonsense". Those facts are enshrined in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. I am only sorry that the hon. Gentleman runs down the excellent work done by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales and the strategies, which were formulated in consultation with all the people working in the health service. It is no use the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) questioning the targets. The first of them has already been reached, but as one goes further and further, such as when dealing with cancer treatment, it becomes more difficult to deal with intractable cases.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Under-Secretary of State agree that the difference in waiting times as between NHS patients and those who are treated privately—often by the same specialist offering to provide identical treatment in a fraction of the waiting time—is unacceptable? Should not the Welsh Office set itself the target of eliminating that disparity?

Mr. Bennett: I certainly want waiting times to shorten and waiting lists to be reduced. I am grateful that the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs examined the question of elective surgery. As part of my evidence to that Committee, I said that I had visited the five hospitals with the worst waiting lists, which between them account for nearly 50 per cent. of the waiting lists in Wales. My officials are currently preparing further information on how we might tackle that situation.

Cardiff Bay Redevelopment

6. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the potential number of jobs to be created as a result of the redevelopment of Cardiff bay.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): It is estimated that if the proposed barrage is constructed, a total of 30,000 jobs will be created over a 15 to 20 year period.

Mr. Butler: Does not my right hon. Friend's reply show the project's tremendous potential for Cardiff and, despite the opposition of some Labour Members, for the valley communities?

Mr. Hunt: It is a vital project and I am concerned that there is as yet no unified approach to it among Opposition Members. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House acknowledge that the barrage is a major flagship project for our capital city of Cardiff, and one which would put us firmly on the world map.

Mr. Denzil Davies: What percentage of those 30,000 jobs will be in the non-productive service sector and what percentage will be in the wealth-creating manufacturing sector?

Mr. Hunt: I cannot predict exactly how those jobs will divide up. I referred to an estimate. Not one of the people to whom I have spoken who have studied the project's job potential disputes the total of 30,000 jobs or the fact that this is a marvellous project for Wales.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a spectacular own goal for the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) to seek to block the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill and stop the creation of those 30,000 jobs, some of which could have been created already if the Bill had made progress as planned?

Mr. Morgan: Ask my constituents.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman shouts from a sedentary position, "Ask my constituents". I hope that everyone who represents our capital city of Cardiff will recognise the project's tremendous potential for Wales, particularly for Cardiff. It is about time that people studied the detailed assurances that have been given. Whenever I have referred to that project, I have said that it will go ahead provided that there is a satisfactory outcome to the groundwater studies. I repeat those words today.

Rural Aid

7. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a further statement on rural aid in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I announced the allocation of £5 million to 36 special rural projects on 19 June. I shall now be considering how best to proceed with rural strategy by publishing my objectives.

Mr. Jones: When the right hon. Gentleman publishes his objectives, I hope that he will explain why £400,000 of the £5 million, about which he bragged to the Welsh Grand Committee on 19 June, is being spent in inner-city Bangor on a floodlit plain? Will he explain whether and, I hope, deny that that has anything to do with the fact that the area is in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts)?

Mr. Hunt: I am appalled at that comment. It is a libel on the people of Bangor. The project was put forward not by Ministers but by the local authority on behalf of local communities. All the projects that came before me were important and of direct benefit to rural areas. On that basis, therefore, I confess that I found selection difficult. I congratulate everyone concerned on drawing up those imaginative and innovative projects.

Mr. Livsey: Given that only about 36 out of nearly 250 applications in central Wales have been approved, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, such is the crisis in agriculture—with farm incomes at their lowest since the war—he should consider introducing legislation to ensure that the Development Board for Rural Wales brings agriculture within its remit?

Mr. Hunt: Last month I prefaced my announcement with the promise that I would find £5 million, and I fulfilled my undertaking. I agree that there were many exciting projects. In considering the objectives of the rural strategy, I shall wish to think about how best to take the matter forward in the light of some exciting schemes which are still to be put into effect. As the hon. Gentleman

knows, agriculture is a matter for the Welsh Agriculture Department. Welsh Office Ministers answer on agriculture matters.

Mr. Rogers: Does the Secretary of State accept— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have called the hon. Member to put his question. Get on with it, please.

Mr. Rogers: I shall do so, if my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) will stop spluttering.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the sums that will be available to help the rural economy of Wales will be greatly affected by the hundreds of millions of pounds that will be poured into the development of a barrage in the Cardiff bay system? *[Interruption.]* Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that those who live in rural areas and those of us who live in the valley communities completely support the principle of the Cardiff bay development? Our only objection is to wasteful expenditure on a barrage that will not create one extra foot of land or one extra job in Cardiff.

Mr. Speaker: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, his comments are a bit wide of the question, but we had better hear an answer from the Secretary of State.

Mr. Hunt: I have been waiting with great anticipation. I strongly support rural Rhondda's claim to put forward views on rural policy. However, I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that the project proposed for Cardiff will not only do much to sustain Cardiff into the next century, but will be a tremendous fillip for the whole of Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: All of us want to build a sound economy for rural Wales. I remind the Secretary of State that recruitment to Her Majesty's forces is one way in which the people of rural Wales can get employment and training. I want a commitment from him that he will fight hard for the Royal Welch Fusiliers even though he represents a Cheshire constituency. I want an unambiguous commitment that he will fight for the Royal Welch Fusiliers to remain a free-standing regiment.

Mr. Hunt: With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall try to respond to that question. First, I represent not a Cheshire constituency, but a Merseyside constituency which has nothing to do with this subject. Secondly, as soon as I returned from north America, I contacted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about the future regimental structure of the Army. The Minister of State kept in close touch with all Ministers at the Ministry of Defence in my absence. I was assured by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that he had not yet received any specific proposals from the Army about reductions in the number of regiments. He assured me that no final decisions had been taken. He is aware that many people have extremely strong feelings about the future of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to influence his party's Front-Bench defence spokesman who recently said that there was no future for the regimental structure in the Army.

ICI

8. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet representatives of ICI in Wales to discuss Government assistance towards its future investment policy.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend met ICI representatives on 23 January when he visited the plant at Pontypool. We are always ready to discuss assistance towards any investment project which ICI may wish to put forward.

Mr. Murphy: The Minister of State is aware that more than 1,000 Welsh men and women work for ICI and that many thousands more are ICI pensioners, all of whom are deeply suspicious of a possible Hanson bid for ICI. As the Secretary of State has been untypically silent about what should happen about the bid—as he is again today—does not the Minister think that either he or his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should make a statement in the House condemning such a bid, or do they both continue to play the role of Pontius Pilate while a vital aspect of Welsh industry is under threat from such a predator as Lord Hanson?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman knows only too well that no takeover bid for ICI has been made. It would be wholly inappropriate to make a statement about a hypothetical situation. The hon. Gentleman referred to pensioners, and that issue is very much a matter for the trustee company and its directors who administer the fund under the trust deed. On 3 July my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry replied extremely well to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam), and I can add nothing to what he said then.

Unemployment

9. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about a change in the level of unemployment during the last year *(a)* in Pontypridd and *(b)* Wales as a whole.

Mr. David Hunt: 772 and 29,043 respectively.

Dr. Howells: In view of the Secretary of State's habit these days of claiming credit for just about every job created in Wales, including the appointment of a rat catcher in "Under Milk Wood", does he realise that there is a great deal of suspicion about today's announcement that 15 jobs are to be created in my constituency in a chlorofluorocarbon refrigeration recovery plant? There is a general suspicion that Wales is being regarded increasingly by other countries as a convenient place to which their poisons can be shipped and in which they can be treated and dumped.

Mr. Hunt: I am very surprised that the hon. Gentleman raised the matter in this context. I should have thought that he would welcome the £2·6 million investment in his area. It is an exciting development which will help to stem the escape into the environment of potentially damaging gases. The protection of our environment has never been as important as it is today and I am delighted that the project, for reclaiming packaging and distributing refrigerant gases, will create new jobs in the area.

Mr. Raffan: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the Fabian Society and with such leading trade unionists as Gavin Laird and Eric Hammond that the introduction of a national statutory minimum wage would be disastrous for employment in the United Kingdom, including the Principality? Does he further agree that the introduction of such a statutory minimum wage could destroy as many as 55,000 jobs in the Principality, including 1,400 in my constituency?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important subject about which the Opposition have been distinctly silent. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of disquiet about Labour's proposals for the statutory minimum wage and there is evidence to show that it would bear unduly harshly on the Principality. My hon. Friend's figure of 55,000 jobs is probably an underestimate. I shall bring my estimate of the losses, which will probably be higher, before the House at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Secretary of State will be aware that this has been an extremely difficult year for young people in particular to obtain employment. In fact, if the evidence of local technical colleges and other colleges of further education is taken into account, it is the worst year for five years. Is not this, therefore, another opportunity for us to consider how we educate and train our young people? The Secretary of State knows that I have made strong representations to ensure that the whole responsibility for education and training is transferred to the Welsh Office. Will he consider that again?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is precisely the moment at which we should look carefully at our education and training policies to ensure that we give every possible job opportunity to people and especially to the younger members of the Principality. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give credit to the training and enterprise councils. The first network was set up in the Principality, ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. It is addressing the matter in practical terms and I strongly support its efforts.

Mr. Rowlands: If the past 12 years have seen such an economic miracle in Wales, why are the Government still having to squeeze out inflation by destroying more and more jobs in our economy, especially as our communities could scarcely be said to be enjoying high wages or making high wage demands? We are the lowest wage economy. If low wages mean more jobs, we should have many more jobs than we have at present.

Mr. Hunt: I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are more people in employment now than there were in 1979. He sometimes forgets that statistic. We in the Principality cannot isolate ourselves from the recession elsewhere in the world. I have recently returned from north America. The United States is in its 10th successive month of recession and Canada has just completed a 14-month period in recession. The hon. Gentleman cannot say that the difficulties are unique to Wales or to the United Kingdom. We cannot isolate ourselves from the rest of the world.

Mr. Barry Jones: Those answers will not reassure Welsh business men who see the economy lurching downwards. Is not it time for an immediate cut in interest rates to stem what is becoming a frightening recession? Does the Secretary of State agree that Wales needs interest rate cuts, investment in our schools, investment in training and investment in industry so that we can have real jobs to face the challenge of the next century?

Mr. Hunt: Sometimes I wish that the hon. Gentleman would recognise that although we have serious difficulties in Wales with the recession, the medium to longer-term prospects for our Principality are still as good as ever. I am sorry that he did not welcome the package of £33 million of investment which I announced today. Fourteen separate industrial projects will create 300 new jobs and will safeguard many more. That is further good news for the Welsh economy and the sheer size of the investment demonstrates clearly that international and home-grown companies in Wales are confidently committing themselves to a better future.

Welsh Assembly

10. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales with whom he consulted, and over what period of time, before concluding that there is no case for an elected Welsh assembly; and whether he will consider any further representations that any all-Wales forum should have some directly elected component.

Mr. David Hunt: My discussions with the local authority associations began in January. I have received a number of representations since then which I have been considering. The hon. Gentleman will know the conclusions that I have reached. With regard to any further representations, I hope that he will accept that I have not tried to stop him making representations to me.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful for that answer. I assure the Secretary of State that I would make any representations that I felt were appropriate. Does not he consider it very odd that when £5,000 million is spent by the Welsh Office, when there are 70 or 80 quangos and when he appoints 1,200 people to nominated bodies, we do not have any directly answerable structure in Wales? When will there be an end to the Secretary of State's role as governor-general? When will we have what every other country has—elected democracy?

Mr. Hunt: The fact that the hon. Gentleman asked me that question and that I must stand here in the mother of Parliaments and answer it shows that I am democratically accountable for what happens in Wales. With regard to the assembly, I must confess that I considered it very carefully. There is a very wide range of proposals. However, none of them explains satisfactorily what would happen to the position of the Secretary of State for Wales. There is a deep suspicion that if Labour's proposals were implemented —the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) may or may not support them—that all-important seat in the Cabinet might be denied to Wales.

Mr. Grist: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the calls from the Opposition Benches for a Welsh assembly and for a guided economy and the opposition to service industries are reminiscent of the 1970s and show that the Opposition parties have learnt absolutely nothing during their period in opposition? Should not they learn some lessons in the future?

Mr. Hunt: They certainly have not learnt the lesson of the referendum in 1979 when the people of Wales rejected

the concept of an elected assembly by a four to one majority. I agree with my hon. Friend: the Opposition do not learn the lessons. People do not want to return to the policies of the 1970s and to that shabby Labour Government who were propped up by an equally shabby Lib-Lab pact. They do not want to return to socialism at a time when the USSR is removing the word socialist from its title and the rest of central and eastern Europe is throwing off socialism. It is remarkable that the Labour party wants to return to just that.

Mr. Ron Davies: Is not there a more recent example of what the Secretary of State has just told us about? Is not the poll tax a better example for him to cite? The Government were trying desperately to hold a line against the overwhelming majority of public opinion and against the views of all the Opposition parties in Wales and a sizeable minority in the Conservative party. Given that the poll tax was ultimately swept away, will the Secretary of State be as consistent in opposing devolution as he was in advocating the poll tax?

Mr. Hunt: I certainly will not support a return—as the Labour party would have us return—to an unjust and inequitable domestic rating system and then to proceed to a revaluation. I strongly condemn the Labour party for failing to enter into consultations, unlike the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru, on the future of local government structure, functions and finance. The door is still open and will always be open. It is about time that the Labour party valued the results of consultation.

Inward Investment

11. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of securing inward investment for Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: For inward investment, the 12 months ending March 1991 was a record year with 147 projects secured, promising 15,000 new and safeguarded jobs and an investment of £585 million.

I have recently returned from what I believe to have been a successful inward investment mission to north America, following which I was able to announce a further four projects. I expect a number of other projects to flow from the visit.

Mr. Jones: My right hon. Friend could be forgiven for being somewhat exasperated at the way in which, every time he announces good news, the Luddite left in the Opposition reacts most contemptuously to it. Is not this the opportunity to say that Wales has been very successful in securing inward investment? Would my right hon. Friend care to suggest why he and everybody else involved in securing that investment have been so successful?

Mr. Hunt: I suppose it is because Opposition Members are trying to make party political points that they do not recognise the important progress that has been made. Since January alone, I have been able to announce support by the Welsh Office for more than 4,500 new jobs and nearly £352 million of investment for the Principality. I believe that the figures represent not just our outstanding record in attracting investment and jobs from overseas, but the setting up and expansion of many home-grown businesses. With the partnership that we have in Wales, I am confident that we will continue that winning record into the mid-1990s and beyond.

NHS Trusts

12. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the public consultation process before an NHS hospital applies for and acquires trust status.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The requirements on public consultation are set out in section 5(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Local residents, health service staff involved and community interests would be consulted before any decision was taken.

Mr. Williams: Is the Minister aware that, in his constituency, Pembrokeshire health authority intends to carry out a leaflet drop to persuade people that a hospital trust is a good idea? Is not it improper for a health authority to pay for a leaflet drop that obviously has strong political connotations? Should not the money for that leaflet drop come from the coffers of the Conservative party or, better still, from the Minister?

Mr. Bennett: It is quite in order for a health authority to explain to the people who live in its area the proposals that it is making to become a national health service trust. Indeed, it is vital for it to do so, because in recent weeks there has been misleading publicity in the local paper. That publicity, which was produced by the Labour candidate for Pembroke and supplied by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), was incorrect and he had to apologise. The article was headed "Labour Apology for Health Chief", and related to information provided by the hon. Gentleman, which he leaked from a Select Committee hearing whose minutes have not been published.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Barristers' Investigations

28. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the scope of privilege enjoyed by barristers investigating alleged criminal behaviour on behalf of individuals or organisations.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Legal professional privilege relating to the discharge by a lawyer of instructions received from his client exists for the protection of the client and forms part of the general law of evidence.

Mr. Dalyell: What discussion took place between the Certification Officer and Government officials before the decision was taken to prosecute Mr. Scargill, Mr. Heathfield and the National Union of Mineworkers last September? Was there or was there not collusion? Have the Government advised the Certification Officer, Matthew Wake, to appeal? Why do the Government allow the Treasury Solicitor to work for the Certification Officer when he is meant to be independent? What is the cost of the case? Why did the Government pass information to the sequestrator?

The Attorney-General: The Certification Officer is an entirely independent statutory office-holder for whom I have no ministerial responsibility whatsoever. The prosecution to which the hon. Gentleman refers was brought by the Certification Officer in the exercise of his independent discretion. The Treasury Solicitor undertakes work for certain independent bodies and office-holders —for example, magistrates—and the staff are well aware of their obligation in that activity to exercise an independent professional judgment.

I am unable to answer the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question for which, again, I have no responsibility. As to the cost of the case, I note that the Under-Secretary of State for Employment gave a written answer on that the other day.

Mr. Fraser: When judicial inquiries such as the Scarman or Woolf inquiries take place, neither the conclusions of the inquiry nor the evidence that is given to it are used as evidence of other offences against those giving the evidence—that is a matter of practice and sometimes a matter of law. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it might be wise of him to issue similar guidelines for inquiries that are carried out by, say, a trade union or a local authority so that the setting up of such internal inquiries is not discouraged, and to ensure that witnesses who give evidence to such inquiries are not later prosecuted?

The Attorney-General: I am not sure that I follow the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question. It is not for me to lay down guidelines about the instructions that a trade union or any other body gives to the professional people who carry out investigations on its behalf. There is no special rule relating to the admissibility in subsequent proceedings of the evidence that is given on such occasions. The ordinary rules of the general law of evidence govern that matter.

Crown Prosecution Service

29. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Attorney-General to what extent the Crown prosecuting service continues to rely on outside agents for the conduct of prosecution work in the magistrates courts.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): In the first three months of 1991, the proportion of cases handled by agents fell to 31 per cent. of sittings and I hope that it will fall further in the remainder of the year.

Mr. Carrington: The reduction in the reliance on agents is greatly to be welcomed. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that that is caused at least partly by the satisfactory increase in recruitment to the Crown prosecution service?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend is right. It is much more satisfactory for the Crown prosecution service to be able to handle a higher proportion of cases itself. That is more satisfactory for the lawyers in the Crown prosecution service and raises their morale. My hon. Friend is right that the reduction in the use of agents stems substantially from the improved recruitment of the past year. During the past four years, there has been an increase of 604 legal staff in the Crown prosecution service, with a net increase of 212 in the past year alone.

30. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Attorney-General what percentage of cases referred to the Crown prosecution service resulted in criminal proceedings being commenced, during each year since the creation of the Crown prosecution service.

The Solicitor-General: The commencement of cases is normally for the police. In the four years to 1990-91, the proportion of cases in which the Crown prosecution service, in the exercise of its review function, decided not to proceed in the magistrates court was 7·3, 8, 8·9 and 9·4 per cent.

Mr. Hughes: The Solicitor-General will be aware that there is often distress for the families of people who have died or for those who have been the victims of an accident or an injury when no proceedings follow. We have all encountered such cases and the aggrieved relatives. Is there any way in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman could formalise the review procedure or institute an appeals procedure at the behest of the families so that they can know that their case is being looked at again and can be involved more publicly in the procedure?

The Solicitor-General: I think that that would be a dangerous course to pursue. However, I fully understand the sensitivity with which any case that involves death has to be treated. The Crown prosecution service takes immense care when considering whether it is right to bring a prosecution in such cases. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, in a free society, it is essential that the prosecution decision should ultimately be taken entirely independently—as it is.

Small Claims Court

32. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the current jurisdiction of the small claims court.

The Solicitor-General: From 1 July 1991, defended money claims for an amount not exceeding £1,000 are referred to arbitration in a county court under the small claims procedure. Claims above £1,000 may be referred to arbitration if one of the parties so requests and the district judge agrees.

Mr. Marshall: Can cases for personal injury be referred to the small claims court in the same way as cases for minor debt?

The Solicitor-General: Yes, Sir. Personal injury cases can be dealt with in the small claims court either if the plaintiff recognises that the damages will be genuinely small and limits the claim to £1,000 or if an application to do so is made to the district judge and he agrees.

Serious Fraud Office

33. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a further statement on the work of the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office continues to make an increasing contribution to the detection and prosecution of commercial fraud.

Mr. Banks: Many people feel that the Government do not take white-collar crime seriously. Perhaps if the Serious Fraud Office had the necessary resources, the fraud surrounding the Bank of Credit and Commerce

International would not have taken place. Even if the office were to acquire the extra resources, what would be the point of its putting all that effort into arresting white-collar criminals such as Ernest Saunders and Gerald Ronson if, once such people have been put in prison, they are let out soon afterwards?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman has asked about five questions, not all of which deal with areas for which I am responsible. As I pointed out in an answer a few weeks ago, the Serious Fraud Office has brought some 54 cases to trial in its first two years of existence, and more than two thirds of the defendants have been convicted.

I am not aware of any significant shortage of resources. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the BCCI case. The papers were sent from the Bank of England to the Serious Fraud Office on Friday and today formal acceptance of the case by the Serious Fraud Office has been announced. As the hon. Gentleman knows, sentences are not a matter for me.

Enforcement of Covenants

34. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the enforcement of covenants.

The Solicitor-General: The enforcement of covenants is essentially a matter of private law. There may be instances, for example section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, in which Parliament gives a public authority a right to enforce a restrictive covenant as if the authority were an adjoining landowner.

Covenants relating to land may confer rights on the public, in which case it is open to the Attorney-General to lend his name to a relator action for their enforcement.

Mr. Thurnham: Where local authorities have a duty to enforce planning covenants, will my right hon. and learned Friend remind them that they have a duty to do so responsibly and robustly, and that they should not run up the white flag and run away at the first signs of aggressive development?

The Solicitor-General: I am well aware of the deep interest in my hon. Friend's constituency about such matters. His views will have been heard and understood.

Weapons Protocols

35. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Attorney-General what further representations he has received seeking changes in international protocols on the use of weapons; and what response he has made.

The Attorney-General: I have not received any representations further to those made by the hon. Gentleman on 17 June.

Mr. Flynn: Has the Attorney-General had the opportunity to study annex VII of the presidency conclusions of the recent European summit and seen the splendid recommendations there about avoiding the over-armament of the world? A new arms race is taking place which threatens the stability of the world and world peace. It threatens, too, to impoverish many third-world countries. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that if we are to achieve the aims and fulfil the recommendations of the European summit, there must be some changes and that there must be some new negotiations on the protocols concerning weapons of mass destruction?

The Attorney-General: I have not had the opportunity to read the publication to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I certainly agree that if there is over-armament, by definition it is a bad thing. Whether we move towards making more changes in any international instrument is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, not for me. Although I have numerous responsibilities, they do not extend that far.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

37. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the level of aid given to Zimbabwe since its independence.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Gross bilateral aid disbursements totalled over £257 million up to December 1990, including loan disbursements by the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and congratulate the Government on the amount of money given to the people of Zimbabwe. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that the most effective growth policy for Zimbabwe would consist of the adoption of a social market economy and the abolition of price controls?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. That is why we welcome the commitment of the Government of Zimbabwe to the economic reform programme. They have a hard road ahead, but during my talks last week with the President, the Minister of Finance and others I was convinced that the proposals that will emerge on 25 July will encompass exactly what my hon. Friend wishes to see. It is good news that the lifting of the price freeze which began in 1988 is to be extended.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister agree that the best way in which to bring immediate and significant benefits to third-world countries such as Zimbabwe would be to roll back restrictions on trade and address the debt crisis? Will the right hon. Lady ask the Prime Minister, at the G7 summit next week, to urge positive action to help developing countries, by implementing and extending the Trinidad terms, relieving debt owed to the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, setting in train a new international initiative on reducing commercial debt and reducing interest rates worldwide?

Mrs. Chalker: On the subject of trade, the hon. Lady will have heard me say in the debate on 14 December last how critical it is for developing nations that the GATT round should give them the opportunity of access to all the major markets of the world, particularly those of the EC. The Government are actively pursuing that aim.

I can tell the hon. Lady, too, that, as it was my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who first proposed the Trinidad terms, she need have no fear that we have not been working non-stop to try to ensure that they will not only be discussed at the G7 meeting but, I hope, accepted, even by those nations that were not so committed as we

have been from the beginning to relieve debt and to extend the relief for those countries that are undertaking economic reforms so that they can have a real chance for the future.

Good Government

38. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on progress in implementing the policy on good government since his speech to the Overseas Development Institute in June 1990.

43. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the policy on good government since June 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: As I said in my speech at Chatham House on 25 June, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, good government in support of sustainable development is an essential approach in our aid programme. Other donors, including the EC and multilateral agencies, are following similar policies. We are committed to a target of £50 million in the coming year for direct assistance towards projects promoting good government.

Mr. Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will receive and deserve the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House for this important initiative. Is she achieving any success in persuading her counterparts in the EC to adopt a similar policy on a co-ordinated basis? Will she note that, although the policy has been extremely successful in respect of Ghana, it has been most unsuccessful in respect of Burma?

Mrs. Chalker: We spent Saturday and Sunday discussing good government and aid in an EC context at an informal Development Ministers meeting in Holland. I am glad to say that our concern that good government should be encouraged is shared by all our 11 partners in the European Community and even more widely than that. The Scandinavian nations, the United States of America, Canada and nearly all the major donors now believe that good government must be among the ways in which we encourage developing countries to improve their performance. It is true that Ghana has made some brave steps and there are encouraging signs, particularly now that the Provisional National Defence Council has invited political exiles to return. With Burma, in respect of which we have no Government aid programme, the outlook is very bleak indeed.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, apart from promoting good government, the initiative also means that money from the British taxpayer is more likely to be spent correctly in third-world countries than was the case in the past?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we can get recipient Governments to show positive accountability to the people and to be transparent in their conduct of affairs, we can be far more sure that our money has reached the place for which it was intended.

Mr. Sedgemore: Would not it aid good government and sustainable development if Britain gave humanitarian aid to Cambodia rather than military aid to the allies of the Khmer Rouge? Is not it a scandal that Treasury counsel spent five hours in the High Court of Justice on Friday arguing that details of the military aid given to the allies of the Khmer Rouge should be kept from the British public?

Mrs. Chalker: I suppose that I should no longer be surprised at the hon. Gentleman. All that I can say to him is that the British Government have never supported the Khmer Rouge and never will support the Khmer Rouge. The British Government help the people of Cambodia through some non-governmental organisations. We do not have a government-to-government aid programme. I only hope that, with other donors, we shall soon be able to help the Cambodian people as a result of the comprehensive political settlement on Cambodia that we hope will be achieved.

Mr. Mullin: The right hon. Lady is being disingenuous. She knows as well as everyone else in the House that the Government have been providing military and other aid to terrorists who are allies of the Khmer Rouge. I appreciate that that is not directly her responsibility, but when will we start aiding the people in Cambodia who are helping to rebuild that country rather than the people who are helping to destroy it?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not listen to a word that I said in response to the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). I have said, and I repeat, that we are ready and willing, with other donors, to help the people of Cambodia in the context of a comprehensive political settlement. We have never given aid to the Khmer Rouge. We will not give aid to the Khmer Rouge. That is exactly what I said to the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch and I have said it before in the House.

South Africa

40. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to aid development in poor areas in South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are already doing so. Our bilateral aid programme for black South Africans is designed to benefit people disadvantaged by apartheid throughout South Africa. We are involved in education, housing, community development and health.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the welcome ending of apartheid must mean——

Mr. Tony Banks: It has not ended.

Mr. Greenway: The approaching end of apartheid—I accept the hon. Gentleman's point—must mean that the South African economy will develop more rapidly and strongly? Will not that benefit all sections of the community and if there is any danger of its not doing so, will my right hon. Friend do all that she can to ensure that it does?

Mrs. Chalker: We have repeatedly stressed that the lifting of the apartheid legislation in South Africa should pave the way for investment into South Africa. The one thing that the black South African needs more than anything is investment in industry and training. That should happen as soon as possible. We have made good

progress in the European context. Good progress is being made in South Africa. I welcome the announcement at the ANC conference that there was a need for flexibility in the lifting of sanctions.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Kenneth Baker—statement.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thought that the hon. Gentleman had just been told that I take points of order in their usual place immediately after statements.

Mr. Williams: I thought that it was after questions.

Mr. Speaker: No, not after questions—after the statements.

Brixton Prison (Escapes)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the escape of two category A high-risk prisoners from Brixton prison using a firearm on the morning of 7 July. They were awaiting trial at the central criminal court for serious offences, including conspiracy to murder and conspiracy to cause explosions.

Yesterday moring the two prisoners, named Pearse Gerrard McAuley and Nessan Quinlivan, attended the first Roman Catholic mass of the day in the prison. The service began at 9.15 am and finished at about 10.5 am. Since both were high-risk prisoners, they were subject to the usual security precautions. Accordingly, they underwent a rub-down search before leaving their secure unit for the chapel. They were escorted there by three officers.

After the service, and again in accordance with the usual procedures, the prisoners were escorted by three prison officers to return to their unit. A dog patrol supervised them between the chapel and the main prison building. Once inside, and in a narrow passageway, one of the prisoners produced a firearm and took one of the escorting officers hostage, holding the gun to his head. He fired a shot above the officer's head, and the other prisoner took the keys of the hostage officer and used them to gain access to the prison centre. In the centre a further shot was fired, which passed through the clothing of another officer. The prisoners and their hostage went through two other gates, entering a building yard.

In the yard, another shot was fired to keep pursuing staff at bay, and the prisoners reached the prison wall at a point where they were able to scale it despite the razor wire at the top. They then escaped into the married quarters area outside the prison and threatened a prison officer who was cleaning his car. They took possession of the car, but abandoned it when they found that their route was blocked.

They were at that point within a few yards of Brixton hill, where they stopped a private car. The driver was ordered out and shot in the upper right leg and the woman passenger got out unharmed. I am pleased to say that the driver is recovering in hospital. The car was driven into Brixton and abandoned in a side street. With the money that they had taken from the car driver, they used a taxi to take them to Baker street tube station.

I am deeply disturbed by this grave lapse of security, and by the associated risk to members of the public. I have decided that we must have a swift and independent inquiry into the circumstances of this deplorable incident, so that any necessary lessons can be learnt promptly. I have therefore asked Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, his Honour Judge Tumim, to carry out a full inquiry with the following terms of reference:

"To inquire into the circumstances of the escape of prisoners McAuley and Quinlivan from HM Prison Brixton on Sunday, 7 July, and in particular to review the security arrangements for handling high risk prisoners in this prison; to assess how those arrangements were operated on the day concerned; and to make recommendations".

I spoke to Judge Tumim this morning, and he told me that he will be starting the task immediately. He will be assisted by the police. I have asked him to submit an interim report by the end of this month. Subject to the need to protect sensitive security material, and to the possibility of criminal charges being laid, I intend that the chief inspector's findings should be published.

When Judge Tumim inspected Brixton last year, his report referred to certain comments on security matters which he had put directly to the director-general of the prison service. These dealt with matters of physical security, including the position and coverage of closed circuit television. I shall be asking the inquiry to pay particular attention to the progress made in these areas.

Judge Tumim also recommended that we should reconsider holding category A high-risk prisoners in Brixton when new accommodation became available at the new Belmarsh prison in Woolwich. The director-general accepted this recommendation. The new unit at Belmarsh for all category A prisoners in London who are designated as a high risk has been recently completed. It had been planned to use this as from November, but I have decided to bring this forward to next month.

In the meantime, I have taken the following action. All governors of prisons which hold category A prisoners, other than dispersal prisons, have been asked to review urgently their procedures for handling category A high-risk prisoners whenever it is necessary for them to leave their secure units. In particular, governors must consider immediately whether religious services can be provided for such prisoners in their living areas rather than allowing them to move to chapels. I have asked the director-general of the prison service to report to me on this as a matter of urgency.

I have also given instructions that other prisoners awaiting trial on terrorist charges should be moved immediately from Brixton to high-security dispersal prisons.

This was a very serious incident and no time must be lost in finding out exactly what happened and taking all possible measures to prevent such an event re-occurring.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The Home Secretary will know that the public response to yesterday's escape of men charged with such serious crimes has been a combination of anger and incredulity that such a thing should happen. We certainly welcome the promise of a full inquiry and we insist that the Home Secretary report its findings to the House. However, there are questions that can properly be answered and must be answered today.

Before I ask those questions I express our sympathy for the man who was wounded during the escape and our admiration for those prison officers who attempted to recapture armed men.

I shall ask the Home Secretary specific questions so that he may, as he must, answer them directly. Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons told the Government that high-risk category A prisoners should not be held in Brixton. He said:

"It did not have the physical defences necessary for the job."

Why were men on terrorist charges not moved out of that prison at once? Why did the Home Secretary wait until two other escapes had occurred? Why is the Home Secretary now taking action that he should have taken last year, and how does he justify such incompetence?

Her Majesty's inspector went on to make recommendations about improved security at Brixton. Why were his

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

comments on the dangers of overcrowding ignored, and why were his recommendations on improved physical security not implemented?

The Home Secretary referred in his statement to "two other gates." Will he confirm that one gate in the prison was open because its security locks had not yet been fixed? He also spoke of the prisoners scaling the wall in spite of razor wire. Will he confirm that all that was necessary for that task was a conveniently placed dog kennel and a wheelbarrow? Will he also confirm that those two category A prisoners charged with terrorist offences were not even kept in a security wing but were held—incredibly—together in an annexe overlooking the builder's yard from which they escaped?

Lord Justice Woolf said in his report on prison disturbances that break-outs were most likely at weekends because of reduced staffing levels. Why has the Home Secretary not even responded to Lord Justice Woolf's recommendation on those matters? Why has action been taken, specifically at Brixton, to increase activity, such as visiting, at weekends while staffing has been left at levels considered inadequate by Lord Justice Woolf six, eight or even 10 months ago? Can we now expect the Home Secretary to take belated action on that subject?

Yesterday the Home Secretary chose not to make a statement himself but to allow an official to represent the Government's point of view. That in itself showed the Home Secretary's attitude. That official response was terrifyingly complacent, for the official described arrangements at Brixton as "adequate", even though that morning two men on terrorist charges had escaped. Nothing that we have heard from the Home Secretary this afternoon suggests that, even now, the Government recognise the seriousness of the situation or that the Home Secretary begins to accept a jot of responsibility for what happened. His response—his wish to skip away from all responsibility for what occurred yesterday—shows that he is entirely unfit to occupy his office.

Mr. Baker: I am not slipping away from any responsibility in this matter. I answer to the House and I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I want the report of Judge Tumim published when it becomes available. I have asked that it should be available by the end of this month, which case will make it the fastest report on any prison incident in recent years.

First, the right hon. Gentleman asked about the securing of high-risk category A prisoners in Brixton. Judge Tumim's report referred to the possibility of other accommodation becoming available as a result of Belmarsh opening, and we have accepted that recommendation. The accommodation has only just been completed: it was to be ready in November, but I have now made it available next month, at the earliest possible opportunity.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman asked where the individual prisoners were kept. They were kept in A wing. The responsibility——

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Home Secretary still sliding away from responsibility?

Mr. Baker: Perhaps I may answer the right hon. Gentleman's original question. The matter will have to be examined by the inquiry, but where individual prisoners are kept is the direct responsibility of the governor.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about overcrowding. I do not believe that yesterday's incident had any bearing on the overcrowding problems in Her Majesty's prisons. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that we have increased the size of the prison officer force by some 4,200 in the past three years, at a time when the prison population has fallen by 5,000. He should at least recognise that that means that there are now two prisoners for each prison officer. When we came to office, there was one prison officer for three prisoners, and in the 1950s there was one prison officer for six prisoners.

We have totally shown our commitment to increasing resources in that way. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman appreciates that the incident that occurred yesterday, deplorable as it was, had any relationship to overcrowding.

Mr. Hattersley: What about the gate?

Mr. Baker: The question of the gate will be a matter for the inquiry to examine, as indeed it should be. I have already heard different evidence from other people about that, and it will be for the inquiry and Judge Tumim to resolve. The right hon. Gentleman is unfair to say that staffing levels have any bearing on the issue. Staff at the secure units in Brixton yesterday were fully up to strength.

Sir William Shelton (Streatham): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what priority the Government give to security in prisons and how much money the Government spend on security? Does he agree that the prison officers in Brixton, in my constituency, do a remarkably fine job, given the antiquated Victorian building in which they have to work? Does he agree that to avoid entirely incidents as lamentable as yesterday's would take a draconian regime such as that at the Lubyanka under Stalin, which would be unacceptable in a civilised country such as this?

Mr. Baker: On the last point, the first responsibility of any prison governor is to ensure that those prisoners submitted to his care and custody are kept in custody. That must be the first responsibility, and he must take measures appropriate to fulfil it.

As for expenditure on security, this year we are spending £13 million on schemes to improve specific aspects of security in prisons, compared with £8 million last year. I must emphasise that that applies only to specific security work. Security protection, and improvements to it, are implicit in almost every facet of the building programme, from major refurbishment of prisons or parts of prisons—which this year alone will cost £81 million—down to quite minor building works carried out at the discretion of individual prisons.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the work of prison officers, to whom I also pay tribute. I accept that working in an old prison such as Brixton is much more difficult than working in a modern one, which is why we are committed to the largest prison building programme that this country has ever known. We are currently building 12 new prisons, which will come on stream in the next two to three years.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Home Secretary acknowledge that Judge Tumim's report drawing attention to the security dangers of Brixton was available to him as long ago as last August but it took him five months to accept the recommendation that high-security prisoners should be moved to Belmarsh

in December, the Belmarsh accommodation being opened in April, but the prisoners not being moved then? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in announcing that prisoners are not to be moved until next month, he is showing a dilatoriness and an attitude to the security of our citizens that is wholly unacceptable in a Home Secretary?

Does he also acknowledge that Judge Tumim's earlier recommendations spoke of the security dangers in having such a depleted staff? Unless and until Judge Tumim contradicts himself, we shall have to hold the right hon. Gentleman personally responsible for not having acted on that advice. The right hon. Gentleman said that he is now asking Judge Tumim to consider whether or not his recommendations on security, made to the director-general, are progressing appropriately. Why did he not ask those questions before the escapes?

Mr. Baker: Various measures were mentioned in Judge Tumim's report in December last year, and specific recommendations were made to the director-general. One recommendation was made to me about the possibility of moving prisoners when Belmarsh became available. I confirm that next month will present the earliest opportunity for Belmarsh to be available, but by then it will be fully equipped and provided with the specialist officers necessary for high-category prisoners.

As to the other recommendations, I was advised by the director-general of the prison service that they were all considered and that action was taken. It will be for the inquiry to decide whether further action should have been taken.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I know that my right hon. Friend accepts the seriousness of the incident, and he rightly advised the House that Judge Tumim's inquiry will investigate management failings, or whatever went wrong, and will report accordingly. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Brixton prison, despite its deficiencies, has a special unit for high-risk category A prisoners, although whether or not that unit was in use at the time of the incident is a matter for the inquiry. Will my right hon. Friend further confirm that Brixton's establishment of prison officers is up to strength?

Mr. Baker: Yesterday, about 150 officers were available in the rest of the prison, and in the security unit the number of officers dedicated to category A prisoners—that is, high-risk prisoners—was fully up to strength.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Home Secretary is responsible for policy. Is it the case that there has been an increase in recent years in the number of provisional IRA prisoners in our gaols? If so, has that been discussed with the prison service? If there are more PIRA prisoners, we are growing nearer, if not close, to the situation in Northern Ireland. Would it not be a good idea to talk to the Northern Ireland Office prison department, which has for many years faced the problem of containing PIRA prisoners who, if they escape, are prepared to injure and to murder, as we saw yesterday?

Will the right hon. Gentleman quickly review the situation at all establishments holding PIRA prisoners, because even if there are only one or two such prisoners at each, the same problems are created? Will he allow the anti-terrorist squad to advise prison officers, because they know more than ordinary prison officers, in the same way as Royal Ulster Constabulary officers in Northern Ireland do?

Will the Home Secretary investigate, in particular, prison perimeters? Yesterday's events proved that security measures suitable for ordinary prisoners are not sufficient to contain persons determined to escape with the aid of a gun.

Mr. Baker: I listened with interest to the right hon. Gentleman's comments, because he has borne responsibility both for prisons and for Northern Ireland. There is a great deal to learn from the Irish penal system and from the Irish prison system. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that there was once a much larger escape than that which occurred yesterday, and we have learnt from such experiences over the years.

As to the question of convicted IRA terrorists, and terrorists generally, yesterday I passed an instruction through the system that particular measures should be taken to review the security of all terrorist prisoners. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, most such prisoners are held in dispersal prisons, where the degree of security for the whole prison—not just for secure units, as in a remand prison such as Brixton or a local prison—is much greater. Their features include a series of walls and dog patrols.

The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that a big prison such as Brixton presents particular problems because it contains a large number of remand prisoners who expect their families and their legal representatives to be allowed access to them. That creates considerable problems when high-risk category A prisoners are being held on remand in the same establishment—as was the case with the two who escaped yesterday. There are two secure units in Brixton, but the men managed to escape when they were in transit from one part of the prison to another. That is why I specifically asked all prison governors immediately to review the situations in their prisons. The problem does not arise in a dispersal prison, but it does in prisons where there are remand prisoners.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): My right hon. Friend's initiative in commissioning an immediate inquiry is welcome. Is it normal practice for visitors to Brixton prison to be adequately searched, given that Brixton contains high-risk category A prisoners? Will my right hon. Friend invite Judge Tumim to consider whether such prisoners should still be allowed to attend acts of collective worship, or whether it would not be more satisfactory for them to be provided with facilities allowing them individual acts of worship, bearing in mind other prison disturbances in the past year?

Mr. Baker: In certain instances, going to chapel has provided an opportunity for prisoners to engage in activities other than spiritual devotion. I have therefore asked all prison governors immediately to examine whether the religious service can be provided in the secure units themselves. That is a sensible suggestion. My hon. Friend asked about visits. All visitors have to be cleared under special arrangements. Their identities have to be verified by the police, and visits are subject to close supervision. Visitors are not allowed to take any hand luggage to the visit, and they are screened by a metal detector. The inmate is searched before each visit, usually

[Mr. Baker]

a rub search, and he is strip-searched after each visit. The visit is supervised by two prison officers who remain in the same room within sight and hearing.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Will the Home Secretary impress upon all concerned the damaging effect on the morale of the police and the security services whose members risk their lives to put behind bars ruthless men who, when they get out or are let out, quickly revert to their murderous activity?

Mr. Baker: I quite understand the right hon. Gentleman's point. I think that the general feeling in the country is of considerable annoyance and anger that this breach of security has led to the escape of two suspected terrorists.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will give all possible assistance to the police and security services in their efforts to capture these two criminals? Further charges relating to yesterday's incident and not to what these two men may have been arrested for before seem likely. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the publication of Judge Tumim's report will not be delayed and changes in security arrangements held up because of any case against these two men?

Mr. Baker: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. I was careful in my description to the House not to identify which of the prisoners was engaged in which action, because it is possible that criminal charges will be laid when these two men are apprehended.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Since these men were outside the secure unit yesterday, can the Minister clarify an earlier answer and say whether that was normal on a Sunday for those two men? He said that the secure unit was fully up to its establishment of prison officers. Rather differently, he said that in the rest of the prison 150 officers were on duty. Is 150 the establishment figure and, if not, how much is it short of establishment?

Mr. Baker: Yesterday another nine or 10 officers should have been on duty in the rest of the prison. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the complement for what is called the A secure group was up to strength and that the number needed to escort category A prisoners was also up to strength yesterday.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that prison officers in this country have better wages and terms and conditions than prison officers anywhere else in Europe? Instead of complaining about underfunding would it not be better for the Prison Officers Association to consider whether its members acted competently in this matter?

Mr. Baker: That is really not a matter for me. I think that it is a matter for the inquiry under Judge Tumim, who will clearly wish to identify the way in which a small firearm and bullets could be smuggled into a prison and used by the two prisoners in their escape.

I confirm my hon. Friend's general remarks about prison officers. I again remind the House that in the past three years we have increased the number of prison officers by more than 4,000 which is the largest ever increase in prison officers. Some 2,500 prison officers are currently being trained, which is the largest ever number undergoing training. That shows our determination and commitment properly to protect the public.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): In the light of yesterday's events, does the Home Secretary accept that my constituents will not be exactly overjoyed to hear that high-risk prisoners are to be moved to Belmarsh? Having visited that prison, however, will the Home Secretary confirm my view that high-risk prisoners are likely to be a great deal more secure there than at Brixton? Furthermore, is it normal for high-risk prisoners on terrorist charges to be allowed to associate with each other to the extent that they can concoct an escape plot of this sort? If that is the case, will that matter also be examined by the inquiry?

Mr. Baker: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that matter will be looked at by the inquiry. As I said earlier, the disposition of prisoners around a particular prison, once they have been allocated to it, is entirely the governor's responsibility. Belmarsh is a very secure prison. That is why we have decided to bring forward the opening date of the secure unit so that high risk category A prisoners can be moved from Brixton at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is grotesque for the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) to come here with a bellyful of outrage when he has consistently opposed the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act and when both he and his party are pledged to repeal it?

Mr. Baker: I agree entirely. The right hon. Gentleman and his party refused to vote for the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. They also never funded the prison service or the police service properly when they were in office. The right hon. Gentleman's outrage is entirely bogus.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): The Home Secretary reported today on what took place on a Sunday. May I remind him that the last serious prison incident, which was at Strangeways, also took place on a Sunday? Does that point in any way to an insufficiency of officers and personnel on duty on Sundays? Were any lessons learnt from the Strangeways inquiry? Will the Home Secretary also comment on the fact that it is now claimed that there has been no random search at Brixton prison since 1987?

Mr. Baker: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his information. Both prisoners were searched thoroughly on 28 June and 3 July, and on 3 July their cells were changed. I fully recognise that there is a problem with high-risk security A prisoners when they go to chapel on Sundays. That is why I have asked governors throughout the country with high-risk security A prisoners to examine whether church services, if prisoners wish to attend them, should be provided in the prisoners' own secure living quarters.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Would it be fair to assume that shooting an innocent motorist is a criminal offence and not a political offence? Therefore, should the fugitives find their way to the Irish Republic,

may we assume that there will be no difficulty whatever in bringing them back to this country under the extradition procedures?

Mr. Baker: The short answer to that question is yes.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As previous inspectors' reports have suggested that weekends are a time of high risk, can the Home Secretary state categorically whether staffing arrangements and levels in Brixton and other prisons are the same at weekends as during the week, or even increased to take account of that danger—or is there a reduction in staffing levels at weekends?

Mr. Baker: The practice for many years in all our prisons has been to reduce staff at weekends because there is less circulation of prisoners, education does not take place, and workshops are not open.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Does my right hon. Friend share my belief that the Opposition spend most of their time worrying about prisoners' rights rather than about their own responsibility to the public? Does he agree that if these prisoners had been left in their cells over the weekend, without the right to have visitors or the right to a so-called church visit, we should not be discussing today what happened at Brixton?

Mr. Baker: If that had been the case, there would have been tremendous complaints to the Home Secretary about what was available to prisoners. There is no doubt whatever about that. A balance has to be struck but, as I made clear to the director-general of the prison service today, the first responsibility of the prison system and of the governors is to ensure that prisoners are held in secure custody.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would the Home Secretary be good enough to answer my question if he can? What does he feel that Sir Thomas Dugdale would have done if he had been Home Secretary? Given all the incompetence of which we have learnt today, does the Home Secretary feel that he has some responsibility for what happened?

Mr. Baker: I accept responsibility, as the Home Secretary must. As the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said, the Home Secretary is responsible for policy in prison matters. The administration, development and running of the prisons are the responsibility of the director-general and of individual prison governors.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the understandable concern and shock felt at this news, which will partly be reduced by the news that there is to be a full and published report. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be ridiculously premature and facile to apportion blame at this stage, in advance of that report?

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend. Already this morning, I have received reports from people who witnessed what occurred in the prison. I specifically did not refer to those reports, which do not confirm many of the points and allegations which have been made. It would be appropriate for Judge Tumim's inquiry to investigate because, as I said, criminal charges are a possibility. One should not, therefore, be too quick to apportion blame or to say that certain events took place when there are question marks over them.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Home Secretary make sure that Judge Tumim's report is published before the House goes into recess around 25 July, so that we have an opportunity to discuss its contents? Would not pressure on the prison authorities at Brixton as a remand prison be relieved if some of the prisoners on remand were brought speedily to trial? There are still a large number of people there who have served longer on remand than they would have served in gaol if they had gone to court and been convicted of crimes.

Mr. Baker: In this case, the evidence was being accumulated in order to bring a prosecution. In general, I agree that it would be better to telescope the time spent on remand. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General are considering various changes in procedure which will accelerate that process.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is something of a red herring to complain about a shortage of prison officers at weekends, as some Opposition Members did, when in reality those men would not have escaped if they had not had a gun? It is important for the inquiry to get to the bottom of that security lapse and find out how the gun came to be smuggled into the prison. Will my right hon. Friend also ask the inquiry to look into the effectiveness of the razor wire, over which the men were apparently able to climb without injury?

Mr. Baker: I am sure that that point will feature strongly in Judge Tumim's report and that he will investigate how it was possible for that event to occur. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said that a wheelbarrow was used, but the evidence that I received this morning shows that such a device was not used in the escape. Reference was made to the proximity of dog kennels to the wall, and the inquiry will certainly investigate that.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): As the hon. Member for a constituency adjoining the prison, I remind the Home Secretary that he has had the advantage not only of Judge Tumim's report but of an earlier report on the escape of two suspected serious terrorists when, in similar circumstances, Lord Whitelaw assured us that such incidents would never occur again. How much personal responsibility does the Home Secretary accept for this disgraceful incident?

Mr. Baker: I am not trying to shirk any personal responsibility. As Home Secretary, I am responsible for the prison service. It is right that Judge Tumim's inquiry should establish what happened to ensure that such events do not recur.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Have not the Government employed increasing numbers of prison officers in recent years to provide an increasing number of searches? Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that there will be regular searches not only of the cells of category A prisoners but of the prisoners themselves so as to lessen the possibility of such incidents recurring?

Mr. Baker: I can assure my hon. Friend that high-risk prisoners are searched very frequently. As I said, whenever they have had a visit—a prisoner on remand has the right to a visit once a day—they are strip-searched. Their cells are also searched, and high-risk category A prisoners are moved from cell to cell randomly and at short intervals.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): May I commend my right hon. Friend not only for the speed with which the inquiry is to report, but on the manner of his statement? Does he agree that, although staffing levels are properly a subject that the inquiry will wish to consider, it is the height of irresponsibility for those who ought to know better to jump to the easy conclusion that staffing levels must have been responsible, even though such conclusions may be politically convenient for them?

Mr. Baker: It is quite clear that staffing levels are not one of the factors involved in this incident. Judge Tumim will explore all the circumstances to try to throw light on how it was possible for a small firearm and bullets to be smuggled into a prison and to be used by prisoners in their escape, which is unacceptable not only to me but to the House and to the country.

Mr. Hattersley: I note that the Home Secretary does at least accept responsibility for policy matters. Why has he been so dilatory in responding to the Woolf recommendation and the Tumim recommendation about weekend staffing? When will he be ready to make recommendations on an issue which, as he has already been warned, causes increased danger on Saturdays and Sundays?

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman also said that I had not interpreted the findings of the Tumim inquiry correctly with regard to Belmarsh. We are discussing weekend staffing with the Prison Officers Association. At present, there are disputes about manning levels at about 40 prisons. Given the tremendous increase in prison officers and the fact that we are currently training 2,500, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will encourage the Prison Officers Association—if it listens to him, which I doubt—to engage in the disputes procedure to resolve those issues.

The right hon. Gentleman attacked me earlier by saying that I had not acted quickly enough on Judge Tumim's recommendations in relation to Belmarsh. I refer him to section 6.11 of the report, which states:

"The need for high risk category A inmates to be held in Brixton should be re-examined in the light of (a) the opening of Belmarsh and prevailing security arrangements."

That is exactly what I have done.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

4.12 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Bank of Credit and Commerce group.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is today attending a meeting of the Economic and Finance Council in Brussels, which is discussing a number of issues that occupied the recent meeting of the European Council. He has asked me to give his apologies to the House for being unable to make this statement himself.

The Bank of England, along with the authorities in a number of other jurisdictions, took action on Friday to secure control of the assets of the Bank of Credit and Commerce group.

The BCC group operated in this country through a Luxembourg incorporated company, BCCI SA, which had a number of branches in the United Kingdom, mostly in the London area. On Friday, the directorate of the Luxembourg Monetary Institute took action under Luxembourg law to secure control of the assets of the company. This was done in consultation with other regulatory authorities concerned, which have taken appropriate action against other subsidiaries and operations of the BCC group.

The effect of these actions was to place the assets and liabilities of the entities concerned under the protective control of the supervisory authorities or of the courts, as appropriate, of each country. In the United Kingdom, following a petition made by the Bank of England, the United Kingdom courts have appointed Touche Ross as provisional liquidator. The effect of this action is that deposits with the United Kingdom branches of BCCI SA are frozen.

The action taken by the regulatory authorities resulted from prima facia evidence, contained in a report commissioned by the Bank of England and recently received, of widespread fraud in a number of jurisdictions stretching back over a number of years. The action was taken in order to safeguard the interests of depositors, other bona fide creditors and the shareholders of the BCC group. A copy of a press notice issued by the Bank explaining its action has been placed in the House Library.

The principal supervisory authorities are seeking the co-operation of other authorities in other countries in which BCCI has been in business, with a view to securing a rundown of the group. They are seeking co-operation to identify and take appropriate action against those responsible for any wrongdoing. Relevant papers have been passed to the Serious Fraud Office.

Within the United Kingdom, the immediate effect of the supervisors' action is that United Kingdom depositors cannot withdraw their funds. Sterling deposits in the United Kingdom branches are covered by the deposit protection fund to the extent of 75 per cent. of deposits up to £20,000—that is, up to £15,000 per depositor. The Bank of England has issued a notice explaining the position of United Kingdom depositors and the operation of the funds. A copy has been placed in the House Library. The

deposit protection fund will be activated as soon as a winding-up order is made in the United Kingdom courts. Claims will be processed as quickly as possible.

The Bank held a meeting with the main high street banks and the liquidator this morning. As a result, arrangements are being set in place for the liquidators to aid the banks in their assessment of applications from small businesses for alternative facilities. Although that assessment is a commercial matter for the banks, I hope that they will respond as sympathetically as possible. The banks are also urgently discussing with the liquidators whether comparable arrangements can be made for small depositors who find themselves in immediate difficulties. In addition, Touche Ross is willing for six weeks to give free advice to any small business affected by the BCCI winding-up.

Under the Banking Act 1987, the Bank of England has sole responsibility for authorising and supervising banks and the Government have no locus in its decisions. The Government were, however, kept fully informed of the proposed action and it has our full support.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Is the Minister aware that the most disturbing feature of the whole affair is that the system of regulation which applied to the BCC group appears to have failed with serious losses for individuals—and companies—who were the customers? In a world in which, following the deregulation of the 1980s, money is permitted to flow in colossal amounts across continents and frontiers, is it satisfactory for financial institutions to be able to minimise scrutiny by locating parts of their operations in jurisdictions in which regulation is deliberately less rigorous? Will the Government pursue at international level through, for example, the Bank for International Settlements and the European Community, the need to make supervisory controls more effective so that a sad outcome is made less likely in future?

On the bank's depositors, do the Government consider that the deposit protection scheme is sufficient, bearing in mind the limitation that only 75 per cent. of the first £20,000 lost can be recovered? Is it not anomalous that the investors' compensation scheme pays far more generous compensation—the first £30,000 in full and 90 per cent. of losses between £30,000 and £50,000?

Can the Minister explain why the audits of the bank do not appear to have revealed the problems that are now apparent? Should there not be a tightening of the audit requirements in respect of banks, for which the regulatory system is rendered less effective by international complications? Can the Minister tell the House when the Bank of England first became aware of the serious problems at the bank? Can he assure us that it is not necessary for a complaint to be made before action is taken?

Does the Minister appreciate that many firms, especially among our enterprising Asian community, which have already had to face the ravages of the recession may now be put out of business through no fault of their own? Given that it was not their fault that regulation failed in this case, what action do the Government propose to take to help those businesses to survive the disaster that has befallen them? Does the Minister appreciate that it is impossible for people to run a business if they have lost the bank that they used and they do not have another bank to provide the facilities? Surely it is possible for the Government to do more than ask the liquidators to advise the banks to accept applications from those business men.

Is not the situation near to a disaster in many Asian business communities? Is it not necessary for the Government to take emergency action, perhaps in co-operation with the Bank of England and the clearing banks, and to give emergency assistance to the businesses? The most important facilities that they need are banking facilities so that they can carry on. Does the Minister appreciate that it is not enough to get free advice from Touche Ross for six weeks? Something more substantial is needed to help businesses, especially Asian businesses, in this community, which are in difficulty through no fault of their own and which are responsible for many thousands of jobs, especially in our inner cities.

Mr. Maples: I do not think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should be quite so dismissive of the generous offer of Touche Ross to provide advice about making alternative banking arrangements to businesses that are in difficulties. The Bank of England and the liquidator are trying to put in place arrangements to help businesses in that position. This morning the Bank of England and the liquidator had a meeting with the nine major high street banks to discover what can be done.

Although there are technicalities which must be overcome—I hope that it will be possible to overcome them—the banks are trying to put together a scheme whereby if a business which is in difficulties and is trying to establish alternative banking facilities approaches one of the nine major banks and releases the liquidator from the requirements of confidentiality, the liquidator will then act as quickly as possible to make available to that bank details of how the business has conducted its affairs with BCCI and their status, and generally provide a substantial amount of information.

As to whether the other bank would be prepared to take on that business, we must bear in mind that different firms may be in different positions. They could be borrowers, have deposits with the bank or simply be seeking alternative banking facilities. However, in all those circumstances, I hope that the arrangements will be brought to fruition. If they are, they would help to deal with the serious problems described by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith).

The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggested that there were problems with the way in which the group was organised, that international co-operation was necessary to supervise international groups and that the system of regulation has not performed as well as it might have done. He also wanted to know when the Bank of England first knew about the problem.

As we all know, there had been rumours surrounding BCCI for a very long time, but there had been no hard evidence—of which the Bank has said it is aware—of any reason for it to withdraw its licence. The evidence of very serious fraud came to light about 10 days ago in the Price Waterhouse report, about which there has been a good deal of publicity in the newspapers. The Bank acted extremely quickly after that.

There is certainly difficulty with international supervision; that is what the current efforts on the second banking directive and co-ordination of those matters at Bank of International Settlements level is about. However,

[Mr. Maples]

the Bank of England played the leading role in putting together the international college of supervisors which for the past two years supervised BCCI's affairs.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also suggested that the deposit protection scheme was insufficient. The level of compensation under that scheme was set by the House deliberately to protect small depositors and not to give a carte blanche Government guarantee on all deposits. It would be extremely expensive and somewhat foolhardy from a prudential point of view if the Government were to give very extensive guarantees. The scheme guarantees everyone 75 per cent. of their money up to a maximum of £15,000 and that can be said adequately to cover small depositors. Larger depositors are, of course, in a very unfortunate position and they will have to wait for the outcome of the liquidation.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the audit procedures. There are difficulties in auditing an international group like this, but the Bank of England took the lead in insisting a few years ago that the group should have one auditor, and that has played a large role in bringing the problems to light.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the protection fund does not cover commercial deposits? As it is not a British bank, will my hon. Friend confirm that the contributory institutions will all be liable to contribute to the fund, unlike the situation under the Banking Act 1987? Will he publish a list of those in the *Official Report*? In light of the overall situation, will he keep the House informed?

Mr. Maples: I will certainly continue to keep the House informed if there are any developments about which I think the House would be interested to hear.

The deposit protection fund covers all sterling deposits with the bank up to a maximum compensation of £15,000. It covers non-resident sterling deposits and commercial sterling deposits, but it does not cover resident non-sterling deposits. As I understand it, the deposit protection board can raise the necessary money either by borrowing it or through a levy on the other licensed banks in the United Kingdom which would share that in proportion in some way to their size. It would hope to recover the bulk of any money disbursed from the liquidation in which it would be an unsecured creditor.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The Minister said that the major purpose of the Bank of England's action was to safeguard the interests of depositors. Clearly the action that has been taken and the compensation available will not be sufficient to safeguard the interests of depositors. It is not simply a case of individual savings being limited to compensation of £15,000. Small businesses, which clearly use sums of money in excess of that, will face grievous losses. A substantial part of the Bangladesh cyclone relief fund had been deposited in that bank and that is now to be limited to £15,000 compensation. Will the Minister again look at the regulations in the Banking Acts 1979 and 1987 and see whether they can be adjusted to a more realistic level to take account of the undoubted needs and problems of thousands of people, savers and small business men, particularly in the Asian community?

Mr. Maples: I said that that action had been taken to protect the interests of depositors, because, if it had been allowed to continue and serious fraud had continued, the interests of the creditors of the bank would have been seriously endangered. The action protects their interests.

As to small businesses, I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman, as I agreed with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), that many of them have a very serious problem. That is why I outlined the arrangements which the Bank of England, the liquidator and the main high street banks are trying to put in place to help those people. I said that I hope that the banks would look at that sympathetically. I outlined what the arrangements would be, but there are some technicalities which must be overcome. I hope that they will be overcome very shortly.

On the adequacy of payments under the deposit protection arrangements, I said that they were deliberately set by the House in such a way as to protect small depositors. It would be very unwise if the House and the Government were to underwrite at public expense all the depositors with a bank in the United Kingdom. That could be very expensive indeed. Depositors of large amounts of money should perhaps be aware that they will not qualify for compensation whereas small retail depositors will.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): While no one, I think, would suggest that deposit protection arrangements should be unlimited, will my hon. Friend give further thought to whether they are sufficient at a level of £15,000, bearing in mind that the United States equivalent is $100,000? Also, is the Abu Dhabi investment authority following these matters very closely and has it said whether it accepts any responsibility in view of the fact that it is the controlling shareholder of the bank?

Mr. Maples: I hear what my hon. Friend says about the adequacy or otherwise of the deposit protection fund, but I can only reiterate what I have already said twice. The level was deliberately set by the House in such a way as to offer protection to small depositors. One should think very carefully before extending that on a much wider basis. I do not think that we would want to be in the position that the United States is in, with lavish deposit insurance which effectively underwrites any banking activities.

The major shareholder has played a constructive role in the bank over the past few years and has injected capital on several occasions. The Bank of England is, of course, in contact with it, and it expects tonight to meet representatives of the shareholders, the Government of Abu Dhabi and the central bank of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Earlier this afternoon, I met members of staff and investors outside the Bank of England. They were desperately worried because they had not been kept informed of the decisions that had been taken. Will the Minister urge the Governor of the Bank of England to keep the staff and investors informed of precisely what is happening? Will he look also at the emergency relief procedure? The procedure that he outlined will take several weeks. I met a person who believed that his life savings had gone because of the decision of the Bank of England. Frankly, in my view, he was potentially suicidal. What action are the Government proposing to take to help such people on an emergency basis?

Will the Minister confirm whether the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, together with the federal reserve bank and the Bank of England were, until very recently, negotiating the possibility of launching a new bank? How was that possible at the same time as an investigation was going on into BCCI?

Mr. Maples: Negotiations have been taking place for some time between the supervisors and the shareholders to see whether the bank could be reconstructed in an acceptable way, but that was before the evidence of the serious frauds came to light. In the opinion of the Bank of England, it is now quite clear that no such reconstructed bank could possibly be acceptable to the supervisors involved. Therefore, that line of thought is no longer being pursued.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the staff. The liquidator met the staff at 2.30 pm today and hopes to be able to pay them last week's wages as soon as possible. For the time being, all those people are still employed by BCCI. The liquidator will clearly need to keep some of them on, but the others will be entitled to whatever they would have been entitled to under their terms of redundancy if the bank had not been liquidated. I understand that employees are preferred creditors for overdue wages and for some, if not all, of their redundancy rights. Therefore, although there is obviously considerable concern and uncertainty among the employees, at the end of the day, they are likely to be looked after as well as can be expected in the circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman then asked about small depositors, as well as about small businesses. The bank is attempting to put in place similar arrangements for small depositors to those that I have described for small businesses. That issue was discussed at the same meeting with the high street banks. If a BCCI depositor gives the confidentiality release to one of those banks—so that BCCI can inform the new bank of the size of the deposit and whether it was secured in any way against a loan or was a free deposit—it is hoped that it will be possible to construct arrangements under which part of the compensation which the depositor could expect to receive from the deposit protection fund could be advanced to the depositor if he or she is in serious need of funds. Again, there are considerable technicalities to be overcome. It is a big and difficult job——

Mr. Vaz: How long?

Mr. Maples: I shall deal with the question of how long in a moment.

The scale of the problem means that it is a big and difficult job. We do not know how many depositors there are, but as there are certainly several thousand, it will be a substantial job. Again, I hope that the banks will look at that matter sympathetically and that it will be possible to construct such a scheme.

On the question of a timetable, the deposit protection board cannot be activated until a winding-up order has been made by the courts. The moment that the Bank has a provisional winding-up order, there is a statutory minimum period of 15 days before the application can be made, although an expedited hearing has been applied for. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we and the Bank will do everything that we can to ensure that that hearing takes place as soon as possible. Immediately the hearing is held, the deposit protection board will announce the procedures for making claims and, again, we shall try to ensure that the claims are processed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): In conjunction with the Department of Employment, will my hon. Friend look into the issue of work permits for this and other foreign banks in this country? Will he pay particular heed to the representations that have been made on the subject by employees in the banking industry?

Mr. Maples: I am not quite sure what point my hon. and learned Friend is seeking to make, but I shall ensure that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Employment are aware of what he said. My understanding is that foreign employees who have work permits from banks are in exactly the same position as foreign employees on work permits from any other organisation. I am sure that they will be treated similarly.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Minister said that there have been rumours about BCCI for some time. Has it slipped his mind that BCCI was successfully prosecuted in the United States for laundering drug money on a massive scale? Does he accept that, while reservations about BCCI might have been common knowledge in City establishments, they could not have been known by the small investors and the small business men, many of whom are Asian, who put their money into that bank in good faith? Will he now answer the question that he was asked earlier about the Bangladeshi cyclone relief fund? Does he accept that the arrangements that he has outlined for helping small business men are not adequate and that the regulatory bodies have failed and now owe a responsibility to the people who are facing bankruptcy because of mismanagement and misaccounting?

Mr. Maples: I am sorry that I omitted to deal with the Bangladeshi cyclone relief fund earlier. It is in exactly the same position as any other depositor. It will receive compensation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] Well, I do not think that it would be right for the Bank of England or the Government to have to pick and choose between the relative merits of different depositors. I understand from what I have read in the newspapers that the sum involved is about £50,000. The fund will be entitled to £15,000 compensation and will then rank as an unsecured creditor, along with the others, in the liquidation. It is far too early to have any idea what, if anything, those depositors will receive, but I hope that there will be some payment for them out of the liquidation.

I turn now to the question whether the Bank of England should have known about this matter earlier. The hon. Lady cited the case of the two people who worked at a branch in Florida and were prosecuted. Under American law, companies are vicariously liable for the criminal activities of their employees in a way that they are not in this country. On that basis, the bank was also prosecuted and pleaded guilty. As I understand it, there is no connection with those who are responsible for running the bank's affairs in the United Kingdom, so the information was not thought sufficient for taking the matter further. I also point out that those convictions took place at the beginning of last year—not all that long ago.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Was it wise to allow the bank to open retail branches? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the degree of co-operation among European central bankers on the matter? Should there not be a full inquiry?

Mr. Maples: I am satisfied with the degree of co-operation among European central banks—that is what has brought the matter to its present conclusion. When the supervisory European authorities—some of them central banks, some of them different authorities—became aware of the problem, they acted quickly, within a week, to achieve the result that we now have.

We can discuss whether the bank should have been allowed to open so many branches, but when it started business it was authorised in Luxembourg and, as I understand it, the Bank of England had no powers to stop it opening branches here. Under subsequent legislation, the extent of the bank's activities was restricted because it was felt that the group was too complex and was opening branches too fast.

My hon. Friend asked a third question, but I cannot remember what it was.

Sir Peter Hordern: A full inquiry.

Mr. Maples: Our first priority is to get an orderly rundown of the group's affairs under way. Further investigations are being carried out by the Bank and presumably considerable further investigations will be undertaken by the liquidator. As I have said, the papers have been passed to the Serious Fraud Office, which will investigate the possibility of criminal prosecutions. It is far too early to say whether we need to go further.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Is the Minister aware that, when the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee visited the bank regulators, including the Governor of the Bank of England, four or five years ago, I told them that, if they looked into BCCI's books, they would find a financial cesspit, only to be met with the reply, "You are aware, Mr. Sedgemore, that this is not a British bank." Does that not suggest that there is something fundamentally wrong with bank supervision?

Mr. Maples: I do not know what facts the hon. Gentleman has to back up that assertion, but if he had facts and he presented them—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is in the habit of making unsubstantiated assertions in the House and I should not be surprised if he did so at the Bank of England as well. I am sure that if he had had substance to back up his allegation, the Bank of England supervisors would have investigated.

The situation was complicated because BCCI operated in several countries, but with regard to the operation in England, the Bank of England had the necessary powers to act. As soon as it was satisfied that it had the evidence to justify taking such action, it took it.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my hon. Friend accept that two questions out of many arise? One concerns the deposit protection scheme. Bearing in mind the fact that many small traders and depositors are at risk, if the money can be reclaimed later, should we not, as as matter of urgency, at least help those people in the short term?

The second question is about the problem caused by the fact that any bank that opens in Europe under European regulations can open a branch here at any time and at its will. As the European schemes are all different, before we allow foreign banks to open here, which means that money can come and go without the Bank of England knowing where it is, should we not make certain that all our regulations are the same? Otherwise, fraud can take place, as we have seen time after time.

Mr. Maples: The problem in this case went well beyond Europe, but part of the second banking co-ordination directive, to which I believe my hon. Friend refers, whereby a bank authorised in one EC country can open branches in others, aims to ensure that common standards of prudential supervision are established. There is already close co-operation among the supervisory authorities and my hon. Friend is right that it is important to ensure that that part of the arrangements is in place, to ensure common supervisory standards.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the problems of small customers—both businesses and depositors. I have described the arrangements that the Bank of England, the liquidator and the high street banks are trying to put into operation. There is no point in repeating what I said, but I hope that those arrangements will be possible. If they are, it will be a considerable help to those two groups of customers. The deposit protection board will be activated very shortly—as soon as the winding-up order is obtained.

I cannot give a timetable for that. I have said that it would be difficult—although perhaps not impossible—to have a hearing within two weeks, but I certainly hope that the deposit protection board arrangements will be activated very shortly.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can we have some dates? Can the Minister tell us when Price Waterhouse was first aware of irregularities, whether the Department of Trade and Industry was informed and on what date, and on what date the Bank of England was first informed of irregularities?

Mr. Maples: The Bank of England obtains information in respect of banking supervision which it then has to treat with considerable confidentiality. It is not open to the Bank of England simply to give the information out to people unless there is legitimate cause, and the person receiving the information then becomes subject to the same sanction. As far as I know, therefore, there was no communication to the Department of Trade and Industry.

The hon. Gentleman asked when the information was received. As I said, the Bank of England received Price Waterhouse's report disclosing the extensive fraud at the end of the week before last—about 10 days ago.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have more than 144 Lords amendments to debate this afternoon. I therefore ask hon. Members to ask brief questions and not to repeat questions that have been asked before.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Has it not been apparent for some time that those who deposited money with the bank needed their heads testing? It is only because the Government changed the laws governing banking in 1987 that the Bank of England could investigate and close down BCCI and that the auditors were able to deliver important information about it. Does my hon. Friend agree that, so far from our needing to increase the

compensation due to depositors, the sum is quite adequate for the large range of small depositors, and that the larger depositors should have known better?

Mr. Maples: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not think that there is any reason to believe that the Bank's supervisory arrangements and powers under the 1987 Act are inadequate.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): What can the Minister say to the House about the link between BCCI and Barlow Clowes on which, as he will know, there has been some sharp public comment? When did his Department and/or the Department of Trade and Industry know of that obviously very disturbing link, and also the Bank of England?

Mr. Maples: These are two different cases. What unites them is that large amounts of money were stolen in both instances. I do not think that there will ever be a system of bank supervision that will stop sophisticated frauds taking place. One hopes that one can limit the incidence of frauds by trying to ensure that only suitable people run banks, that their affairs are properly audited and that proper supervisory powers are in place. I am afraid, however, that it will not be possible completely to eliminate fraud, and in this case the fraud was extremely sophisticated and complex.

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): Having introduced the Banking Act 1987, may I, through my hon. Friend, commend the Bank of England on the way in which it conducted its role on the international scene in bringing this unfortunate matter to a head? Does my hon. Friend recognise, however, that there are genuine concerns about the fact that a bank whose management and business have widely been known to be in a mess for such a long time should have been able to remain in business for so long?

Will my hon. Friend look again at the provisions of the banking legislation which make it automatic that authorisation in one member state of the European Community is effective in every other member state—irrespective of the fact that, in this case, it was clear that the authorisation procedures in Luxembourg were inadequate to deal with the bank?

Mr. Maples: Under the second banking co-ordination directive—as I told my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark)—it will be important to ensure that those common standards of supervision are in place. That is an essential ingredient of the arrangements and I do not think that it would be satisfactory simply to allow branch banking on the basis of a home country passport unless we were all satisfied with each other's standards of supervision.

I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's comments about the conduct of the Bank of England in this matter are passed to it, and I am sure that those concerned will be happy to hear them.

As to my hon. Friend's strictures on the way in which the bank has operated in the past, I must point out that, although there has been a good deal of rumour, there has not been very much fact, and it is not possible for the Bank of England to operate on anything other than evidence. If the Bank decides to exercise the draconian powers conferred on it in the Banking Act 1987 to put a bank into liquidation or revoke its licence, its decisions are subject to appeal to a banking appellate body and it has to be able to justify its decision by reference to hard evidence. The Bank acted as soon as it felt that it had that evidence.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): But is the Minister telling us that anyone can come to Britain with a bank from Luxembourg and rip off depositors without any intervention from the Bank of England? As it has become clear from comments in the Chamber that a large number of people had informed the Bank of England, the Bank of England must have been aware of BCCI's shortcomings, so why was no action taken? Does the Minister agree that it would be handy if the depositors who are being short-changed as a result of this fraudulent operation sued the accountants—whose attention the complexity of the fraud apparently escaped because of their incompetence or complicity?

Mr. Maples: That is a travesty of the facts. It is not for me to comment on the accountants' role in the matter. I am sure that they are more than capable of defending themselves—and no doubt if the hon. Gentleman repeats his remarks outside the House, he will find that they do so.

On the question of small depositors being ripped off, I repeat that there are compensation arrangements, which I have already described, under the deposit protection fund arrangements.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Peanuts.

Mr. Maples: I do not think that £15,000 is peanuts. Anything under £20,000 should be compensated. That decision was taken by the House deliberately to protect small depositors. As I said in answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I do not think that it will ever be possible to institute supervisory arrangements that preclude any chance of complicated, sophisticated fraud taking place.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): May I ask my hon. Friend a simple question? As a result of the Bank of England's decision, the high street banks will have to provide large sums of money under the protection scheme. Can my hon. Friend assure me that that will not affect those banks' policies towards other small businesses that they fund locally in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I do not see why that business should be affected, but I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's comments are communicated to those concerned. Any funds that the banks have to advance to the deposit protection board are recoverable out of any proceeds available on liquidation and one therefore hopes that funding that they might have to provide to the deposit protection fund will be by way of a loan. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's point is communicated to the Bank of England.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The Liberal Democrats join hon. Members on both sides of the House who have urged the Minister to take further steps, particularly to help those small Asian businesses threatened by bankruptcy at present—not least because Lord Harris, speaking from the Liberal Democrat Benches, raised his concern about BCCI on an unstarred question more than a year ago. No action proceeded from that. Does the Minister agree that, in view of the obvious failure to stop the fraud taking place and in view of the long timescale in which concerns were being expressed—particularly from

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

the Liberal Democrat Benches—it would be appropriate to have a full independent inquiry into why the Banking Act appears to have failed in this case?

Mr. Maples: The points made by Lord Harris in the other place were to do with the prosecutions in Florida of those involved in laundering drug money. Lord Harris made no suggestion that a complex fraud was taking place at the bank; that came to light only very recently.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether it was appropriate to have an inquiry. As I said, the priority at the money is to ensure that an orderly running down of the bank's affairs gets under way. That is the priority of the Bank, the liquidators and, I hope, the shareholders. The Bank, the liquidators and the Serious Fraud Office will be conducting further investigations. There is already a lot on the agenda and it is too early to decide whether it is necessary to do anything else.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Has the Minister had the opportunity to discuss with his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry the BCCI insurance group, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of BCCI? As the DTI, a Government Department, is the regulator of that company, will he have some conversations with it, if he has not already done so, and seek to reassure the House that BCCI insurance group's investors—many of them, in all probability, the same people who had investments with the bank—are secure?

Mr. Maples: The Bank has communicated the grounds for its action to the DTI, and it is in that Department's power and up to it to decide what to do about the associated insurance company. I am sure that it will take whatever action is appropriate under its regulatory powers to protect the interests of customers and clients of that insurance company.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): This is a case in which the Government have watched with abject complacency while a group of shady bankers walked off with millions of pounds of ordinary people's money. Yet those who indulge in what in south Wales is called "hobbling"—topping up one's benefit with a tenner or so from gardening—immediately invite the attentions of fraud officers. Why are the Government so keen to regulate and prosecute the poor while they are so indifferent to a proper regulatory mechanism for the financial world?

Mr. Maples: It seems to me that we spend half our time in this House discussing regulatory arrangements for the financial world. What the hon. Gentleman describes is not recognisably the position with which we are dealing. I said that the papers had been passed to the Serious Fraud Office. It seems clear from the evidence that serious criminal offences have taken place. If so, the people responsible will undoubtedly be brought to justice.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Is my hon. Friend aware that many successful businesses, including many in Leeds, which are financed by borrowings from BCCI, will now look to other bankers to set up new financial arrangements and will have heard with interest my hon. Friend's comments today? One problem they face is that their assets are charged to BCCI. Will my hon. Friend ensure that the liquidator acts promptly to implement any change in banking arrangements made by those companies so that they can survive?

Mr. Maples: I said that certain technicalities had to be ironed out to enable the arrangements to be put into effect. The point that my hon. Friend made is one of them. It may be necessary for the new bank to advance to its new clients sufficient money to discharge the debt to BCCI and thereby have the security released so that it can be charged to the new bank. Alternatively, it may be necessary for the new bank to put a second charge on those assets. That is a technicality which needs to be ironed out I am sure that the liquidators and the banks will address that problem constructively. I hope that that will result in the type of action that I have described.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): In which year was the £15,000 figure felt to be adequate? What would be the equivalent real value of that money today? Will the Minister confirm that, if the figure was set in 1987, the figure now would be nearer £20,000 and that, if is was set in 1979, it would be over £30,000? As adequacy seems to be the criterion, would not it have been logical for the figure to reflect changes in the value of money?

Mr. Maples: I am afraid that I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman the date on which the figure was set. It would have been since and under the powers of the Banking Act 1987, so the figure would certainly have been set during the past four years. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and let him know when it was set.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Is it not the case that, although many people said that BCCI was dodgy, obtaining hard evidence was difficult? Is it not also the case that, of the 69 countries in which the bank operated, including its home base of Luxembourg, it was Britain which finally uncovered the serious fraud? Does not ultimate responsibility for helping depositors lie with, not British taxpayers but the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, whose large shareholding in BCCI instilled the confidence in it without which BCCI would not have been able to operate on the scale that it did?

Mr. Maples: I am sure that the Bank of England will be grateful for my hon. Friend's comments about the role that it played in the international supervision of the bank. It put together the college and, as he said, uncovered a fraud. The shareholder to whom my hon. Friend refers has a constructive record with the bank. He has injected additional capital on several occasions. As I said, representatives of the shareholders, the Bank of England, the liquidator, the Abu Dhabi Government and the United Arab Emirates central bank are meeting this evening. It remains to be seen what will come our of those discussions.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): May we return to the question of dates and in particular what the Minister knew and when? The Minister said that the report with some conclusions was presented 10 days ago. Can he confirm the statements made at the end of last week that there was hard evidence aroung the beginning of the year and, as we have heard today, suspicions and rumours for a considerable period before that? Can he tell us exactly when Price Waterhouse first alerted the Bank of England and/or the Department of Trade and Industry that there

were prima facie grounds for suspicion and an investigation? When was the first time that Price Waterhouse told either of those bodies?

Mr. Maples: There certainly were rumours such as the hon. Gentleman describes about BCCI, but few were substantiated by any fact.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Some of them were.

Mr. Maples: I will come to the point—*[Interruption.]* As far as I know, none of the rumours was substantiated by the sort of facts that would be required to enable the Bank of England to act. The facts which eventually came to light and the grounds on which the Bank has acted were evidence of a sophisticated and complex fraud which was not part of the rumours and which, by its nature, could not be evidence of rumour. A new officer of the bank told the Bank of England that she thought that there were some strange goings-on and unrecorded transactions in the bank at the beginning of this year. Very shortly afterwards, Price Waterhouse was asked by the Bank of England to conduct an investigation. As I said, it reported to the Bank of England about 10 or 12 days ago. The Bank acted within about eight days of receiving that report.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): My hon. Friend may know that one of the unusual characteristics of this bank is its considerable international network of banking branches, notably in Africa, and that in some of those countries it is a large player in the local commercial banking market. Could he perhaps bring it to the attention of the Bank of England and the other international regulatory authorities that in winding up the institution they should do their utmost to avoid damage to growing private enterprise in such countries and to local economies?

Mr. Maples: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I am sure that the Bank of England will also hear what he says. The lead liquidator is the liquidator of the holding company in Luxembourg—Touche Ross. The liquidators in the various other countries are—perhaps this is not a proper, technical, legal description—their agents. The Bank of England is fully occupied with looking after matters in Britain and with the depositors and customers of the business here, who were referred to in other questions. However, I am sure that the bank will have heard what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Was it not a little more than rumours—to go back to the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)? Was not the issue raised in questions from the former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan? That should have alerted the authorities. Will the Minister clearly confirm that Price Waterhouse told the Bank at the beginning of the year? What did he mean in his answer to my hon. Friend when he referred to "strange goings-on"? Could he explain that phrase? If there were strange goings-on in the bank, is it not odd that there was such a lack of curiosity on the part of the Government?

Mr. Maples: I went on to say that there were unrecorded transactions. Immediately after that was reported, drastic action was taken which has resulted in the bank being put into liquidation.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): My hon. Friend will be aware that BCCI appears on the Bank of England's list of approved banks for investment. Will he consider the position of the 10 local authorities which have substantial investments in the bank? What priority will be given to them when they require funds for local authority services?

Mr. Maples: One clearly appreciates and sympathises with the difficulties in which any depositors find themselves. However, I am afraid that, in the liquidation, large depositors such as the local authorities to which he referred will rank as unsecured creditors, alongside the other depositors. They will be entitled to £15,000 compensation from the deposit protection fund if they meet the relevant criteria. I hope that the liquidation will result in some pay-out to those depositors, but I am afraid that it will not be possible to make special arrangements for one group of depositors.

It would be invidious for the bank, the Government, or, for that matter, the liquidators to choose on some grounds of objective merit between categories of depositors. There are only two categories. There are small depositors who will receive perhaps the bulk of their money back—up to £15,000. Larger depositors will also receive £15,000, but for them it will represent a much smaller percentage of their deposit.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Don't this Government ever learn? In September 1984, a similar incident occurred with Johnson Matthey. Some of us, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), raised the matter. We raised the very question of whether auditors and accountants should act as whistle-blowers in order to let the people and the Government know about banks which were still touting for custom when they had almost gone down the pan. Yet here we are seven years later with a repeat exercise of almost the same thing that happened then. The truth is that this bank would not have been told by the Bank of England to stop trading if it had not been for the Americans—just like in the Guinness scandal—realising that it was uncomfortable and sensitive for them with the drugs scandal and Noriega and deciding to tell the British Government that they had better pull their finger out. That is the reason why the bank was closed.

Mr. Maples: If the hon. Gentleman suggested at the time of the Johnson Matthey scandal that auditors should be allowed to blow the whistle on their clients, it must be one of the few constructive suggestions that he has made in the House. It must be of some satisfaction to him that his suggestion was acted on and that, in the Banking Act 1987, auditors were given the power to do exactly that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the questions on the statement I am sure that you noticed the repeated suggestion from my hon. Friends and Conservative Members that something major was wrong with the bank. I wonder how it is possible then that Conservative Members did not exert pressure on the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) who has been an adviser to that bank for years?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Orders of the Day

Road Traffic Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 5

DISAPPLICATION OF SECTIONS 1 TO 3 OF THE ROAD TRAFFIC ACT 1988 FOR AUTHORISED MOTORING EVENTS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 3, line 15 after "be" insert "included among those"

5 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Chope: These are technical amendments to the clause which disapplies sections 1 to 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 for authorised motoring events in public places.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

After clause 19

Lords amendment: No. 3, to insert the following new clause—*Exception from requirement of third-party insurance*—

(" .—(1) Section 144 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1) (which removes the requirement for third-party insurance or security where £15,000 is kept deposited with the Accountant General of the Supreme Court) for "£15,000" there shall be substituted "£500,000".

(3) After subsection (1) there shall be inserted—

"(1A) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument substitute a greater sum for the sum for the time being specified in subsection (1) above.

(1B) No order shall be made under subsection (1A) above unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament." ")

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment responds to concerns expressed in the House on behalf of the Motor Insurers Bureau—the guarantee fund, funded by the insurance industry—which provides for the victims of uninsured and untraced drivers.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I understand that this amendment is the Government's response to pressure from their Back Benchers who tabled amendments on Report, which were not debated.

Have the Government sought simply to increase the sum of money required? It is not clear to us why the provisions should exist at all, and the Minister has not made it clear today. We believe that it would have been better to remove the provision altogether.

Mr. Chope: The Government believe that it is reasonable to allow some organisations—for example, the Automobile Association—to place a deposit rather than have to take out a specific insurance for their risks. That has been the position since 1930, and there has not been a single occasion since when someone operating in that way has not been able to meet his debts. That is the rationale behind the amendment. The sum has not been increased since 1930, and we believe that it is now time to increase it and to take powers to increase it further by affirmative order should that be necessary.

Ms. Ruddock: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. We welcome the fact that the sum has been increased considerably and that powers will exist to increase it further. Given that undertaking, we will support the amendment.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 24

INTERIM DISQUALIFICATION

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 22, leave out lines 6 to 14.

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 5.

Mr. Chope: The amendment simply clarifies the effect of a period of interim disqualification on the length of disqualification which is ordered on sentence.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 5 agreed to.

Clause 26

PENALTY POINTS TO BE ATTRIBUTED TO OFFENCES

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 23, line 31, after "offence" insert

"in the last column of Part I"

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 80 and 81.

Mr. Chope: These technical amendments result from the change to the penalty points attributable to offences that involve obligatory disqualifications.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 33

CONDITIONAL OFFER OF FIXED PENALTY

Lords amendment: No. 7, in page 34, line 20, leave out ("75(6)(a)") and insert ("75(8)(a)").

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This amendment corrects a drafting error.

Question put and agreed to.

Before Clause 34

Lords amendment: No. 8, to insert the following new clause—*Disabled persons' badges*—

(".—(1) Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (badges for display on motor vehicles used by disabled persons) shall be amended in accordance with subsections (2) to (5) below.

(2) For subsections (2) and (3) there shall be substituted—

"(2) A badge may be issued to a disabled person of any prescribed description resident in the area of the issuing authority for one or more vehicles driven by him or used by him as a passenger."

(3) In subsection (4), the words "and any badge" onwards shall be omitted.

(4) After subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(4A) A badge issued under this section may be displayed only in such circumstances and in such manner as may be prescribed.

(4B) A person who drives a motor vehicle on a road (within the meaning of the Road Traffic Act 1988) at a time when a badge of a form prescribed under this section is displayed on the vehicle is guilty of an offence unless the badge is issued under this section and displayed in accordance with regulations made under it.

(4C) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (4B) above shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale."

(5) In subsection (5), the words "and in the case" onwards shall be omitted.

(6) In section 117 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (wrongful use of disabled person's badge) for subsections (1) and (2) there shall be substituted—

"(1) A person who at any time acts in contravention of, or fails to comply with, any provision of an order under this Act relating to the parking of motor vehicles is also guilty of an offence under this section if at that time—

(a) there was displayed on the motor vehicle in question a badge of a form prescribed under section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, and

(b) he was using the vehicle in circumstances where a disabled person's concession would be available to a disabled person's vehicle,

but he shall not be guilty of an offence under this section if the badge was issued under that section and displayed in accordance with regulations made under it."."

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will also be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 51 to 53, 92, 130 and 137.

Mr. Chope: The amendment responds to concerns expressed in this place and in Committee in another place about the misuse of the orange badge scheme, particularly by able-bodied people. There is a problem in enforcing the existing offence, because section 117 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 depends upon the fraudulent use of a disabled person's parking concession. The amendment is intended to supplement the existing offence to enhance the deterrent effect.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The orange badge scheme derives from clause 21 of my private Member's Bill which became law as the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. The scheme now benefits more than 1 million disabled people. For many of them the scheme has meant all the difference between seeing only their own four walls, day by day, and independent living worthy of the name.

That there would be abuse of the scheme was argued when I first proposed it in 1970. My view then, as now, was that the scale of any abuse depends, to no small extent, on the severity of penalties for abusing the scheme and the effectiveness or otherwise of their enforcement.

This important Lords amendment should lead to more effective enforcement of the penalties available for dealing with abuse. It should lead to fewer allegations of abuse and to an environment in which the benefits conferred by the scheme can be developed and improved. The amendment is therefore one of very considerable importance and will be widely welcomed here as it was in another place.

I pay tribute today to the Joint Committee on Mobility for Disabled People on its work to secure the amendment, and also to the Disabled Drivers Motor Club, the Disabled Drivers Association and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation for their extremely well-informed briefing on the working of the scheme.

Can the Minister tell the House when we shall be given an implementation date for the Government's proposed more extensive changes to the orange badge scheme, including the introduction of a passport-style badge? Is he aware of the very deep concern that has been caused by the growing practice of towing away disabled people's vehicles, even where no hazard is involved? Clamping of their vehicles is not allowed, but should the Minister not be acting urgently to stop the towing away of vehicles in cases where the disabled person can be left totally immobile on the street?

In another place, an amendment was moved to end any linkage between the pay of traffic wardens and the number of tickets they issue. That amendment did not succeed, and it is now widely felt that, in consequence, linkage between pay and the number of tickets issued by a traffic warden has been given some legitimacy. What are the Minister's comments on this issue, which, as he will know, is of considerable importance to disabled people as to other drivers?

Will the Minister also make it clear that the aim of public policy in regard to the scheme must not be to reduce the number of beneficiaries, but to ensure that there are sufficient penalties for abuse and the power to enforce them? Again, I welcome the action taken in the Lords, and pay tribute to all who have been concerned in framing the amendment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I am sure that the House will join me in paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on his part in introducing the orange badge scheme in the first place. As well as the committees that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, I am sure that the House would also want to recognise the work of the Department of Transport statutory advisory committee to the Secretary of State, and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, its chairman Sir Peter Baldwin and committee members.

About six years ago, I had the pleasure of travelling around the Netherlands with a civil servant, Neville Rees, who has done a great deal of work on the orange-badge scheme. I am sure that the House would wish him comfort in his present state of discomfort.

The House would welcome a word from my hon. Friend the Minister about whether we can expect further action outside the legislation. We would also welcome his comments on the points raised on the new clause.

As well as the problem of abuse, there is the problem that many people do not understand how vital it is that the orange badge should be issued to those who need it most. I hope that issuing authorities will not feel that they are doing anyone a favour by loosening the criteria for which an orange badge is designed. It is critical for those who cannot move more than about 50 m without it, and is not designed for those people for whom it will simply make shopping more convenient. If we reach the stage of

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

degradation when 5, 10 or 15 per cent. of the population can have a badge, its use to those who are virtually immobile, or who need a wheelchair to become mobile, becomes diminished.

When the scheme was introduced, the problem of how to stop it becoming too slack or being abused was discussed. Without wishing to appear unsympathetic to those with other kinds of handicap, the orange badge means most to those who need to be driven as passengers or to drive themselves, to be as close as possible to their place of work or their shops or to visit people in other services or businesses.

I hope that my remarks will be conveyed through my hon. Friend the Minister to the disabled transport unit of the Department and to those in the private and voluntary sectors who came together to make the Mobility road show at Crowthorne such a glorious success. The Department's response to the International Year of the Disabled and the way in which Ann Frye and her team have done so much are a tribute to the partnerships between the statutory and the voluntary, and the extra-statutory and the committed in the private sector. I also welcome the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), whose work for the disabled has done a great deal to put the Conservative party on a par with the individual efforts of the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe, who did so much when he was a Minister.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I had the pleasure of moving several amendments for disabled organisations at the Committee stage, when I asked many questions about the rights of disabled badge owners on red routes. Will all disabled badge holders have the right to stop and park on existing red routes and those that will be introduced in the future? There is only one red route at present but I understand that more will be introduced. Will the orange badge become universal throughout the country? Some London boroughs, such as Westminster and Kensington, do not observe the scheme.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I should like to add to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) about the importance of orange badges for disabled people who could not otherwise get out of their homes and carry on their work or participate in other activities in the community.

The scheme's problems are caused by its success. There are now more than a million orange badge holders, and in my borough there are now 8,000. That represents 4 per cent. of the adult population, which is rather more than the figure of approximately 3 per cent. for the whole country, so the scheme seems to be more successful in Bolton than elsewhere. However, that brings its problems, and the people of Bolton are concerned about those who abuse the scheme and use the badges when they should not do so. In the past week, there has been a front page story in the newspaper about the concern felt in my area.

I thoroughly agree that local authorities need to crack down much harder on that abuse. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will make it clear to local authorities that they should act strongly, and give them more powers if necessary.

At a recent Motability scheme meeting, I was shocked to hear that junk shops in Blackpool have been selling bogus orange badges. That shows the extent to which the abuse is growing. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look into any abuse on that scale. It seems to be a sick joke that anyone should attempt to sell the badges in that way. One also hears of second-hand cars being sold for a higher price if there is an orange badge in the car.

The best way to crack down on such abuse is to have a photograph in the orange badge. I was pleased to see a specimen of a new type of orange badge, which I understand that my hon. Friend intends to introduce. It will have a photograph inside it, which will stop people using it when it does not belong to them. Everyone to whom I have spoken about the new-style badge has said that it is very good, and I look forward to its introduction. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has any reason for delaying its introduction further. If so, I hope that he can overcome any problems and introduce it as soon as possible.

5.15 pm

The restriction of the issue of orange badges presents many problems. It would be wrong simply to restrict them to those who receive a mobility allowance. It would reduce the numbers, because only 670,000 people now receive mobility allowance, but that number will increase with the new disability living allowance, under which there are two categories of mobility allowance. We must be careful how we restrict the number of badges issued.

It is proposed that the present wording, which says that the badge should be issued to those who experience "very considerable difficulty in walking", should be changed to those who experience "extreme difficulty in walking". I presume that that still leaves a great deal of discretion to general practitioners in interpreting it. We must be careful not to restrict the badge in such a way that those who have a reasonable degree of movement will be prevented from going out and playing an active role in society.

It is no use our saying that people can go out, if they are not in a fit state to go out anyway. Rather, those who can go out and make good use of their mobility should be encouraged to do so. Therefore, I do not support any draconian measure to limit orange badges to a small number of people. A year ago, there was an outcry when it was suggested that thalidomide victims should be denied orange badges. That shows that we must be careful how we interpret the measure.

I received a note from a constituent who suggested that the issuing of orange badges should be linked to a computer index run by the registrar of deaths, so that, when people died, they would automatically have the orange badge removed. Otherwise, the deceased person's family may be tempted to continue to use it, or his or her car may be innocently sold with the orange badge still in it.

Equally, people who have successful operations—for example, on their hips—may become fully mobile again but be reluctant to give up their badge. Although, in the first few months, they may feel unsure of the success of their operation, once it is clear that they are fully mobile, they should give up their orange badge and not be tempted to continue to use it.

I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister pressing ahead with his proposals. I particularly look forward to his

new-style orange badge coming into effect, and hope that the scheme's success will continue to grow, but with some limit on the numbers.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to all those who have participated in this short debate for supporting the amendment. It is obvious that, if we are to have such a scheme, it must be properly enforced and those who try to avoid the regulations must be subject to deterrent penalties. That is the great virtue of the amendment.

I share the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) about the need to ensure that the scheme is not unduly restricted. The right hon. Gentleman said that he did not wish to reduce its scope. When he first introduced the scheme, he predicted that some 30,000 people would benefit, I understand that, at the end of last year, no fewer than 1,160,000 people were benefiting from it. Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman and everyone else must be delighted with that.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may remember that, in 1969-70, we were very uninformed about the numbers and needs of diabled people. I was arguing the case of the organisations of and for disabled people who wanted a national orange badge scheme. We appreciated that it would have to be phased in to ensure proper administration. I had no doubt that more than 30,000 people would ultimately benefit from what all the organisations of and for disabled people now regard as an important aid to independent living.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for explaining that. I am not sure whether he was predicting that more than 1 million people would benefit from the scheme, but that is certainly the position today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) referred to a distinguished member of the Department of Transport, Neville Rees. I saw Neville last week; he is as well as can be expected in the circumstances and is enjoying reading the latest best seller, "Gridlock", an appropriate title for someone working in the Department of Transport to read.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) referred to red routes, as he did several times in Committee. There are no concessions involving the red lines themselves, but, as a result of the red routes, we shall be able to provide more loading bays where, with appropriate signing, disabled people will be able to park. One benefit of the pilot scheme is that it will now be possible for people visiting Moorfields eye hospital to park outside it, which they were unable to do under the old regime.

The debate has, understandably, ranged wider than the amendment, but I hope that I shall be able to introduce regulations to deal with the passport-style badge in the not-too-distant future. While the Government are absolutely committed to the introduction of a passport-style badge, they want to try to ensure the maximum consensus on the other amendments to the scheme.

Some people are worried that, as expressed at present, the proposals could result in a number of people with orange badges finding that they were unable to renew them when necessary. I am sure that, due to the scheme's popularity and the extra mobility it affords, if we were to adopt such proposals, we should do so only when we fully understood the implications of doing so. I am reconsidering that issue at present, and next week I have a meeting with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, when it will be on the agenda.

Mr. Fearn: The Minister will recollect that I asked about the authorities that do not observe the orange badge scheme. Has he any proposals for them?

Mr. Chope: That must follow on from the review of the scheme. In the other place, Lord Boyd-Carpenter explained, in a form that was well understood by their Lordships, the difficulties faced by a borough in the centre of London when administering a scheme where, prima facie, more than 1 million people with orange badges would be able to park on the streets. Some central London boroughs have experienced that difficulty—Kensington, Chelsea, Westminster and parts of Camden. I know that we are in discussion with those councils, but I cannot promise that those discussions have reached a final and successful conclusion—much will depend on the final form. I assure the House that our commitment to introduce a passport-style badge is absolute.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend will be aware of the efforts of the parliamentary committee, which is chaired by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and the secretary of which is my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam). In his further considerations, will my hon. Friend the Minister give serious thought to cases where there is a dispute between those who are most severely handicapped in mobility terms and those who are somewhat handicapped? Will he ensure that the needs of the most severely handicapped are always taken into account, and, if it comes to a choice between the two levels of need, where necessary, priority is given to those who need help most?

Mr. Chope: I think that what my hon. Friend is saying is that the person making the decision should have the wisdom of Solomon. I hope that that will be so.

Question put and agreed to.

After clause 38

Lords amendment: No. 9, to insert the following new clause—*Variation of charges at off-street parking places*—

(" . After section 35B of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 there shall be inserted—

35C.—(1) Where an order under section 35(1)(iii) of this Act makes provision as to the charges to be paid in connection with the use of off-street parking places, the authority making that order may vary those charges by notice given under this section.

(2) The variation of any such charges by notice is not to be taken to prejudice any power to vary those charges by order under section 35 of this Act.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision as to the procedure to be followed by any local authority giving notice under this section.

(4) the regulations may, in particular, make provision with respect to—

(a) the publication, where an authority propose to give notice, of details of their proposal;

(b) the form and manner in which notice is to be given; and

(c) the publication of notices.

(5) In giving any notice under this section a local authority shall comply with the regulations." ")

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This amendment adds a new clause and introduces a further section into the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

[Mr. Chope]

The new section has the same effect as that provided by clause 39, except that it applies to variations of charges of off-street parking places. It has been introduced in response to a request from the local authority associations.

Question put and agreed to.

After Clause 39

Lords amendment: No. 10, to insert the following new clause—*Permitted and special parking areas outside London*—

(".—(1) Schedule *(Permitted and special parking areas outside London)* shall have effect for the purpose of making provision with respect to areas outside London corresponding to that made with respect to London, and areas within London, under sections 57 to 69 of this Act.

(2) In this section "London" has the same meaning as it has in Part II of this Act.").

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 72, 73 and 82.

Mr. Chope: When we last debated the parking provisions of the Bill in this House, I said that the Government would introduce amendments in the other place to allow for specified, non-endorsable parking offences to be decriminalised in specially designated districts of London, and to be enforced by local authority parking attendants. Amendments were introduced in Committee in the other place which now appear as amendments Nos. 72 and 73. They will enable my right hon. Friend, on application by a London authority, to make an order decriminalising specified parking offences in the district to which the order relates. Those areas will be known as special parking areas.

The first of the two new clauses introduced by the amendments specifies the offences to be decriminalised. It enables the Secretary of State, after consultation with the police and the relevant local authority associations, to add to the list of decriminalised offences to apply in special parking areas. If my right hon. Friend is made aware of further offences that could be covered by the parking area orders, subject to consultation with the police and the local authorities the list of decriminalised offences may be added to without the need for further primary legislation.

The second new clause applies the provisions of the new system of penalty charges developed for the enforcement of permitted parking in London to the decriminalised offences within the special parking areas. The London authorities will have extended powers to wheel clamp and remove vehicles in the special parking areas. There is a power for the Secretary of State to modify in the order any of the provisions of part II of the Bill in respect of their application in special parking area.

The principle of the amendments was widely welcomed when it was discussed in the House, and the amendments were given a similar reception in the other place. The Government were therefore pleased to respond to calls to consider the issues involved with the provision of a general enabling power providing for extension to other parts of the country of the new arrangements for permitted parking and special parking areas in London. Our considerations led us to conclude that such an enabling power was both possible and desirable. The amendments, which were carried in the other place, now appear as Nos. 10 and 82.

Ms. Ruddock: We regard the amendments as extremely important. They provide for highway authorities outside London to have an additional tool to use in their efforts to deal with the growing problems of congestion and environmental difficulties brought about by illegal parking. The fact that the Government introduced the amendments in the other place shows what an effective Opposition working in conjunction with representative organisations can do to influence the shape of legislation.

It would be churlish not to welcome the Government's decision to amend the Bill in this way, but it would also be wrong not to remind the House that in Committee and on Report the Government strongly resisted Opposition amendments designed to have a similar effect. The Government's change of heart is particularly welcome to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, which has been pressing for the change for six years in the face of what it regarded as unhelpful conclusions in the report of the Home Office working party on enforcement, unfruitful meetings with Ministers and strong ministerial resistance during the earlier stages of the Bill.

However, we should like to move forward, not backward. In moving the amendments in the other place, the Minister—Lord Brabazon of Tara—said that while the Government envisaged experience being gained in London they took advantage of the powers in relation to authorities outside London. That approach appears to have merit, but while the general adoption of powers outside London should not take place before there has been some experience in the capital, we believe that there would be considerable merit in some authorities outside London also being given the go-ahead, so that experience could be gained in other areas on a pilot basis.

That suggestion was made on Report in another place, when the Minister said:

"I said in my speech that probably we would wish to see the experiment in London before other authorities in the country try to implement the provisions. That is our opinion at the moment. However, if any local authorities outside London wish to come forward with schemes, we shall be very willing to discuss them, provided that the police are also satisfied with the proposals. That is an important proviso."

5.30 pm

In the light of those remarks, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities is currently discussing with its members the scope for a number of them to volunteer as guinea pigs in the deployment of powers outside London. Proposals for such trials are likely to be submitted to the Department later this year, and we hope that Ministers will be keen to discuss them positively with the association and the authorities involved.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: About six years ago, some local authorities in London and elsewhere were rather more loopy and left-wing than they are today. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) commented fairly that the Home Office was not the first to be convinced that this was a sensible concept.

One of the problems of enforcement for the police was that they did not receive the recycled receipts in respect of penalties imposed on those motorists who parked in the wrong place, or who stayed too long at a parking meter. Today, we have in effect a net cost regime, whereby some

of the income from penalties can be used towards the cost of enforcement. Without wanting to break the Treasury rule against hypothecation, there are great benefits to be gained from effective enforcement, which are shared by the motorist trying to find somewhere to park legally. We know that Westminster, for example, declares a £3 million gain from effective enforcement.

I personally believe that effective parking control leads to a reduction in unnecessary traffic. One finds fewer people driving around trying to find a space to park where there are yellow lines because they know that if they do so effective enforcement will bring the consequences of inconvenience and expense. One finds also that fewer people occupy a meter for half a day or more, because they know that an attendant will soon be along to impose a penalty if they overstay their time. The balance of convenience is outweighed by greater enforcement.

I support the hon. Member for Deptford in her remarks about pilot schemes outside London. Experience in London will not always be duplicated elsewhere. There are many towns and cities where it would be possible to run experimental schemes with the agreement of the local police and of the Home Office.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the pragmatic way in which he has advanced matters. Motorists have the most to gain from a stricter system of parking enforcement. Road pricing would be a daft way of achieving the same ends. We ought to emphasise that, for people who earn a great deal of money, sitting in traffic jams is a waste of their time.

If we suggest that people with enough money should pay to buy some road space, that may be taken up by those working for local authorities—who will expect them to meet the charge—or for big business, who have no problem with money but only with time. Such an arrangement would penalise teachers, for example, living in one area, dropping their children off in another area, and driving to work at a school in a third area. However, perhaps that is straying off the subject of parking control.

Mr. Fearn: Am I right in thinking that, before a local authority can implement any scheme, it must make an application to the Secretary of State and receive his approval?

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I fully support the amendment to the extent that it tidies up certain points of law. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister counts it as only the first tidying up, because much remains to be done in respect of the law on wheel clamping outside the metropolitan area. A profitable business has been created by private companies clamping cars outside hospitals and in private car parks, when the motorists concerned are often unaware that they are forbidden to park there. Wheel-clamping firms impose incredible charges. The most recent example I know of involved a penalty of £45, in the city of Southampton.

I believe that the Association of Wheel Clamping is acting because of the general weakness of the law as it applies outside London. My hon. Friend the Minister would be right to argue that the law of trespass prevails, but the imposition by private companies of large fines on private motorists in not within any law that I know of outside the London area, and it is something on which my hon. Friend the Minister might usefully comment.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful for the support of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) and to the whole House for supporting the amendments. Sometimes, it takes longer for the Government to reach the right conclusion, but I am sure that we have done so in this case. That has been possible because of co-operation between my Department and the Home Office.

Ms. Ruddock: And the Opposition.

Mr. Chope: Certainly, but the Opposition have always been of the same opinion as the Government supporters. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends also pressed me hard in Committee for the common sense behind the amendment.

Knowing as we do how stretched are police resources for allocation in London, it does not make sense to deploy them on parking offences when they could be directed at preventing crime. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said, if local authorities or their agents enjoy sufficient income from penalties, it can be used to increase the level of enforcement. Consequently, when people drive into London, they are more likely to find a parking space, rather than be tempted to cause an obstruction.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) is right to suggest that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have to consider individual applications. The procedure is set out in detail in the amendments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) raised the fraught question of wheel clamping on private land. Nothing in the Bill deals with that issue, and the law relating to it is subject to a certain amount of dispute. In the High Court recently, a motorist appealed against a conviction for criminal damage after he forcibly removed a wheel clamp that had been applied to a vehicle left on private land. The court found that in the particular circumstances of that case the conviction should stand because warning notices were clearly displayed on the land and that the individual who trespassed on it with his vehicle was deemed to have accepted the risk that his vehicle would be wheel clamped. However, I have no views on the definitive law. One or two other test cases are in the offing, although in one instance the defendants in a civil case withdrew. There is some difficulty in securing a definitive ruling on the civil aspect of wheel clamping because the courts can adjudicate only on cases that are brought before them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Test will be aware that Southampton has one of the best-known wheel clamping firms in the country. I do not know whether anything that he said was meant as implied criticism of that firm's activities. Hon. Members will welcome the code of practice or guidance produced by wheel clampers which specifies the maximum recommended fees for the removal of a clamp.

In Southampton there is much evidence that wheel clamping on housing estates has made it easier for tenants there to keep their parking spaces. Some private organisations seem to be making good use of wheel clamps. As I have said, one of the largest wheel clamping firms is based in Southampton. The legislation is a revolution in parking enforcement. It will begin in London, but bids from authorities outside London will be assessed on their merits.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 40

PARKING ATTENDANTS

Lords amendment: No. 11, in page 39, line 27, leave out from ("may") to end of line 30 and insert

("provide for the supervision of parking places within their area by individuals to be known as parking attendants.

(1A) Parking attendants shall also have such other functions in relation to stationary vehicles as may be conferred by or under any other enactment.

(1B) A parking attendant shall be—

(a) an individual employed by the authority; or

(b) where the authority have made arrangements with any person for the purposes of this section, an individual employed by that person to act as a parking attendant.

(1C) Parking attendants in Greater London shall wear such uniform as the Secretary of State may determine when exercising prescribed functions, and shall not exercise any of those functions when not in uniform.")

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The amendment involves privilege. With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendment No. 76.

Mr. Chope: The amendment inserts a new clause after section 63 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to provide local authorities with a clear general power to appoint parking attendants to supervise parking places. The amendment will enable parking attendants in London and elsewhere to enforce parking restrictions in special parking areas as well as the new permitted parking controls for which part II of the Bill provides.

Mr. Fearn: We welcome the amendment but query its powers, because they seem to apply only to London. However, the Minister spoke about "elsewhere", which could mean that the powers will apply outside London. I sympathise with the noble Lords who attempted to find an amendment that would introduce some guidelines on the method of payment for parking attendants. I understand that the Government disapprove of remuneration to parking attendants being based on the number of penalty charge notices issued. I agree that that would be entirely wrong.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing to add to what was said in the other place about some parking attendants being paid on the basis of the number of tickets that they issue. The Bill contains new and valuable safeguards which will enable people who feel aggrieved to go to an adjudicator. Some people feel that they are being penalised not because they overstayed the meter time but because the attendant has gambled on their not coming back to the car until the meter had ticked past the excess charge. The amendments contain the power to extend the legislation outside London, and that will be done by order when application is made. That has been considered by the Government.

Question put and agreed to. [Special Entry.]

Subsequent Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 41

VARIABLE SPEED LIMITS

Lords amendment: No. 12, in page 39, line 36, leave out "In"

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 16, 83 to 86, 88, 89, 93, 94, 121, 131, 133 and 139.

Mr. Chope: The amendments are largely technical and are designed to improve clause 41, which provides for variable speed limits to be imposed by highway authorities in certain circumstances.

Ms. Ruddock: In connection with amendment No. 14, what other subjects, apart from the variable speed limits, might the regulations be used to deal with?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Minister says that the amendments are technical, but it is only by getting technicalities right that local highway authorities, which look after 94 to 96 per cent. of our roads, will have the opportunity to take traffic calming measures and protect the living cells, such as people on foot and on bicycles, who have as much as if not more priority than drivers.

Hon. Members will know about the number of times it has been necessary to change regulations and incorporate speed-reducing features and contributions from road traffic engineers. Such features cut speed by working sometimes on the psychology of the drivers and sometimes on the urban environment. It is important to emphasise to consumer groups, residents' groups and tenants' groups that they should campaign not for signs indicating lower speeds, but for traffic management and engineering which leads to vehicles travelling more slowly. That was one of the lessons that people learned from potholes. It has been learnt by the Danes and the Germans and, most importantly, by people in the Netherlands. Many local authorities, including some in London, have been pushing for such measures for some years.

5.45 pm

In the boroughs of Wandsworth and Bromley on two occasions the regulations did not allow the arrangements to come into force. However, traffic was moving slowly and there was no risk if the highway was changed to inhibit people travelling at speed.

I think that the amendments and the clause have all-party agreement and that they will make it possible to continue adapting what highway authorities do to keep traffic on through roads and away from routes used by people on foot. Such journeys constitute half the journeys in the country. It should be possible to require traffic going through residential or shopping areas to go much more slowly. A person in a one-and-a-half tonne steel vest should not feel that he has an automatic right to shove to one side an elderly person, a child or some other road user.

I pay tribute to the many highway engineers who work as agents for the Department as well as principals in their own right for the advances that they have made. I hope that we shall reach the stage at which Britain is the safest country in the world not just for drivers but for pedestrians, especially children. We must use the contributions of highway engineers. The erection of a sign

saying 15 mph or 20 mph is a reflection of their work rather than just an indication to motorists to drive more slowly.'

Mr. Chope: I agree with my hon. Friend. About a fortnight ago, I was in Exeter visiting Devon county council, which in the past month published a book—it is more a book than a pamphlet—giving examples of traffic calming measures that have been introduced not just in Devon but in Wandsworth, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. There is no need for local authorities to keep reinventing the wheel. I commend that publication to those who are interested in traffic calming measures.

Wandsworth is not the only London authority to reduce casualties on the roads in residential areas and its success is due in no small measure to its enlightened attitude on traffic calming. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said, as well as putting up a sign one must introduce highway engineering measures.

In reply to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) I can say that the regulations will not cover other subjects. They cover speed limits and associated matters such as signing. For example, Lords amendments Nos. 83 and 94 make it clear that the Secretary of State may authorise road humps that do not conform with the regulations. The amendments go slightly wider, in that context, than pure speed. They are related to other matters that one can describe as ancillary matters.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) raised an important point. Am I right in thinking that, if a local highway department wanted to introduce road humps or any other speed-limiting feature that did not comply with the regulations, the Minister would be happy to receive an application from it and to consider whether the regulations needed to be adapted so that what made sense on the ground would also be legal?

Mr. Chope: That is very much the case, yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

After Clause 41

Lords amendment: No. 17, to insert the following new clause—*Tramcars and trolley vehicles*—

".—(1) After section 141 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (tramcars and trolley vehicles) there shall be inserted—

"*Tramcars and trolley vehicles: regulations.*

141A.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that such of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2) below as are specified in the regulations shall not apply, or shall apply with modifications—

(a) to all tramcars or to tramcars of any specified class, or

(b) to all trolley vehicles or to trolley vehicles of any specified class.

(2) The provisions referred to in subsection (1) above are the provisions of sections 1 to 14, 18 and 81 to 89 of this Act.

(3) Regulations under this section—

(a) may make different provision for different cases,

(b) may include such transitional provisions as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient, and

(c) may make such amendments to any special Act as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient in consequence of the regulations or in consequence of the application to any tramcars or trolley vehicles of any of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2) above.

(4) In this section—

"special Act" means a local Act of Parliament passed before the commencement of this section which authorises or regulates the use of tramcars or trolley vehicles;

"tramcar" includes any carriage used on any road by virtue of an order under the Light Railways Act 1896; and

"trolley vehicle" means a mechanically propelled vehicle adapted for use on roads without rails under power transmitted to it from some external source (whether or not there is in addition a source of power on board the vehicle)."

(2) After section 193 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 (exemptions for tramcars, trolley vehicles etc) there shall be inserted—

"*Tramcars and trolley vehicles.*

193A.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that such of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2) below as are specified in the regulations shall not apply, or shall apply with modifications—

(a) to all tramcars or to tramcars of any specified class, or

(b) to all trolley vehicles or to trolley vehicles of any specified class.

(2) The provisions referred to in subsection (1) above are the provisions of—

(a) sections 12, 40A to 42, 47, 48, 66, 68 to 73, 75 to 79, 83, 87 to 109, 143 to 165, 168, 170, 171, 178, 190 and 191 of this Act, and

(b) sections 1, 2, 7, 8, 22, 25 to 29, 31, 32, 34 to 48, 96 and 97 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 (provisions requiring warning of prosecution etc. and provisions connected with the licensing of drivers).

(3) Regulations under this section—

(a) may make different provision for different cases,

(b) may include such transitional provisions as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient, and

(c) may make such amendments to any special Act as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient in consequence of the regulations or in consequence of the application to any tramcars or trolley vehicles of any of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2) above.

(4) In this section "special Act" means a local Act of Parliament passed before the commencement of this section which authorises or regulates the use of tramcars or trolley vehicles." "

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 101, 138, 143 and 144.

Mr. Chope: This new clause fulfils an undertaking given in Committee in another place to consider an amendment on the application of road traffic law to tramcars and trolley vehicles which received unanimous support there.

Ms. Ruddock: This is an important amendment, which we very much support. It provides, as the Minister said, for the application of the road traffic law to tramcars and trolley vehicles. It is important that the Bill should provide for this type of regulation, due to the planned opening in October of the Manchester metrolink and light rail system that includes an element of street running, which we support. As transport policy develops and as the Government join the common-sense consensus about new modes of transport, there will be more and more

[Ms. Ruddock]

opportunities to use this measure to complement the provision of light rail systems that are used on roads, and also tramcars and trolley vehicles.

We support the amendment and are grateful to the Government for tabling it.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 18, to insert the following new clause—*Applications for licences to drive hackney carriages etc.*—

".—(1) Part II of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (including that Part as it applies in any area at the commencement of this section) shall have effect with the insertion of the following subsection after subsection (1) of each of section 51 (licensing of drivers of private hire vehicles) and section 59 (qualifications for drivers of hackney carriages)—

"(1A) For the purpose of satisfying themselves as to whether an applicant is a fit and proper person to hold a driver's licence, a council may send to the chief officer of police for the police area in which the council is situated—

(a) a copy of that person's application, and

(b) a request for the chief officer's observations;

and the chief officer shall respond to the request."

(2) Where any local Act contains a provision requiring a district council to be satisfied as to the fitness of an applicant to hold a licence to drive a private hire vehicle or a hackney carriage, the council may send to the chief officer of police for the police area in which the council is situated—

(a) a copy of that person's application, and

(b) a request for the chief officer's observations;

and the chief officer shall respond to the request."

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment concerns the licensing of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers by district councils. At present under the law governing the licensing of these drivers, district councils have to satisfy themselves that an applicant for a driver's licence is a fit and proper person. The council may require the applicant to disclose any past criminal convictions, but it has no power to check that information against police records.

The effect of the amendment is that when a district council has to decide whether an applicant for a licence to drive a taxi or private hire vehicle is a fit and proper person the council may copy the application to the local chief officer of police with a request for his observations. The chief officer must respond to that request.

The origins of the amendment are to be found in early-day motion 667, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), which relates to the subject. It was signed by, I believe, 180 other Members of Parliament. Although it will not be possible to bring the new clause into force immediately, for reasons that were explained in the other place, the aim is to complete the necessary process of consultation by 1 April 1992.

Ms. Ruddock: The Minister claims that one of his hon. Friends deserves credit for the amendment. However, it represents the successful conclusion of a long-running campaign by the local authority associations to enable them to obtain information from the police about whether applicants for taxi licences are fit and proper persons. The amendment is the Government's response to an amendment tabled by the Opposition in the other place.

The amendment is very much supported by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, an important organisation that has been campaigning, particularly on behalf of women but also on behalf of everyone in society, for greater personal security in the use of taxis and car hire. When he replies, I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that he agrees with the trust that the police will require extra resources to carry out this task effectively. We very much support the amendment and are pleased that it has been tabled by the Government.

Mr. Hill: May I correct a few of the words of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock)? I am grateful for the tremendous help from the Association of District Councils. After I communicated with it, the association wrote to many local authorities. They were only too willing to make sure that Members of Parliament in their area signed my early-day motion. At the last count it had been signed by 193 Members of Parliament. An amendment was tabled that said virtually the same, except that those hon. Members who supported the amendment wanted the legislation to be in force before the summer recess. As I know how tight the schedule is, I thought that they were going a little far. In total, 220 Members of Parliament of all parties signed the early-day motion. I am grateful for their help.

The first real breakthrough came when the national association of taxi and private hire licensing and enforcement officers conducted a survey of 136 councils. When they replied, it was discovered that, in an 18-month period, 148 people who were already holding a taxi driver's licence had criminal records. That was but the tip of the iceberg.

The metropolitan area is well covered. It receives details of criminal records, but it is difficult for the chairmen of outside licensing authorities to reach the correct decision. For example, at a critical time, Southampton gave a taxi driver's licence to a person who had just been released from prison for rape. The chairman of the licensing authority, a Labour councillor, felt that it was his duty to resign. The licence was rescinded.

Such terrifying decisions, reached without knowledge of the facts, led me to believe that I should take up this important matter. The method is that every established taxi driver is sacrosanct; he will not need reassessing and it will not be necessary to go back into history. The chief constable is put under tremendous pressure. He will need not necessarily more police but more office staff to work the mainframe computers. Apart from obvious crimes, such as rape, who would want to hire a taxi driver who had been in prison several times for grievous bodily harm, child molesting, child battery or a sexual offence of any kind —even exposure to the public of his person? The chairman of the licensing authority will need a great deal of information.

I thought it unfortunate that the wording states that a request will have to be made for the chief officer's observations. It could have been beefed up a little, by making it mandatory for chief officers to obtain the names of applicants and to give the details of any criminal background to the chairman of the licensing authority without a request having to be made, but so be it. This is very good news for all of us.

I have in my hand a computer printout of the names of all hon. Members who signed the early-day motion. It makes an impressive list. Members of Parliament, of all

parties, are very concerned about this issue. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said that this measure will come into operation in the not-too-distant future. I hope that he is not thinking of 12 months hence.

My local newspaper, the *Southern Evening Echo*, went to great efforts to find out about the rapist. One cannot do without such knowledge. Local people must know what is going on, and further information about other applicants must be disclosed.

Co-operation was shown by the East Anglian Taxi Association, whose secretary, Mr. Richmond, is here, and the Southampton Taxi Association, whose representative, Mr. Lankford, did much valuable work. Local authorities brought pressure to bear on me and other hon. Members. The Government should be congratulated on this measure. There should be no harping by the Opposition. The Lords amendment will be welcomed. It is the most important amendment to the Bill.

6 pm

Mr. Fearn: The Lords amendment applies to those who grant hackney carriage licences. In time, will it be extended to minicabs?

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I am delighted to take part in the debate. This issue has concerned me for 15 years since the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 came into force. In 1976, I became chairman of Reading borough council's local transport committee and was almost immediately faced with this issue. It was said to us at that time that the legislation was an attempt to tidy up even earlier legislation, the Town Police Clauses Act 1847.

Almost immediately, there was a feeling that this loose end created danger for our citizens. I am delighted that borough councils such as Reading, where I served, and Thamesdown, part of whose area I represent, will feel that this loose end has finally been tidied up.

There is no doubt that women are afraid of using taxis at night because a taxi driver may have a criminal record and therefore be a potential threat. It is sad that taxi drivers with no criminal record and no possible problem in this respect are tarred with the brush of uncertainty. Women may choose not to use a taxi to get home at night because of that fear and therefore put themselves into greater danger.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will respond positively to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and tell us that the provision will be brought into effect as quickly as possible. There could be an incident today, tomorrow or the day after which might have been avoided if the legislation had been on the statute book a few months ago.

Let us not forget the balance of the rights of ex-offenders. Much was said in this place and in the other place about the need to protect passengers—of course that is right—but offenders have rights which must be respected.

What observations does my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State expect the chief officer to provide in response to a request by a local authority? Does my hon. Friend expect the whole criminal record of an applicant to be revealed to the local authority or only the parts that may be considered germane to the application? Will the chief officer merely be asked to say, "Yes, this is a fit person," or "No, this is not a fit person"? That is not clear from the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend will make clear precisely what information chief officers should provide that will enable a local authority to decide whether someone is a "fit and proper" person to hold a taxi licence.

I warmly welcome the Lords amendment and I hope that it will soon be part of our legislation.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to all those who have spoken in support of the Lords amendment. I assure my hon. Friends the Members for Test and for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) that we will implement this measure as quickly as possible. I mentioned the aim of doing so by 1 April next year, and that remains the Government's objective.

Of course, a cost will be associated with this provision. Work will be done on the details, and that is why we are consulting. The measure has wide-ranging application. A large number of taxi drivers and private hire vehicle drivers in England and Wales operate outside London—35,000 taxi drivers and 50,000 private hire vehicle drivers.

The provision will not apply to minicab drivers in London because, as the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) probably knows, at present there is no licensing system for those drivers. For that reason, the Government asked the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to consider whether we should introduce a licensing system for such drivers and, if so, what form it should take. I agree with what the hon. Member for Deptford said about the fine work that that trust does.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my hon. Friend answer my question? Will the chief officer reveal the whole criminal record or only part of it, or will he state whether, in his judgment, an applicant is a fit and proper person to hold a licence? It would be helpful to have an answer to that question.

Mr. Chope: Of course, that matter will be subject to discussions with the district councils, but at the moment we believe that the chief officer should disclose all convictions about which information is held nationally at the national identification bureau.

Mr. Hill *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that hon. Members do not have the right to speak again, having addressed the House once. If the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) wishes to intervene, that may be permissible.

Mr. Hill: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to intervene. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary return to his statement on the commencement date of 1 April next year? Could not several pilot schemes be started? I think particularly of Southampton in this case. By 1 April, several dozen more ex-criminals may be licensed.

Mr. Chope: I cannot go further than I have gone already. I am sure that my hon. Friend's efforts will have gained their reward, in the sense that people who have been able to tell an untruth will realise that the day of reckoning is nigh. I am sure that that will inhibit applications from those with convictions which will soon materialise. I have no doubt that taxi drivers and private hire vehicle drivers with criminal convictions will wish to look for another profession before this measure comes into effect.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If one person in four, or 25 per cent. of the male population, has already been convicted of an indictable offence by the age of 20, and one person in three, or 33 per cent. of the male population, has been convicted of a serious offence by the age of 30, it may be worth publicising which of those offences will disqualify an applicant and which can be admitted.

If one accepts the principles involved in the rehabilitation of offenders and wishes to make applicants more open about their convictions, people should know the ground rules. It is fine to give people a warning, but it may be useful if the Department of Transport and local authorities will consider publicising the details so that applicants can decide what information to give, knowing that they will confirm their honesty in giving their convictions and that those convictions will not necessarily disqualify them.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 45

THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Lords amendment: No. 19, in page 41, line 22, after "Commissioners;" insert—

"( ) the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee;"

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 20, 22 to 27, 29, 31, 33, 34, 37 to 39 and 77.

Mr. Chope: The Government have a long-standing commitment to promoting the improvement of transport facilities and opportunities for people with disabilities. When the subject has been raised during the passage of the Bill, we have said that, given those commitments, the needs of people with disabilities will be dealt with in the Secretary of State's traffic management and parking guidance and will therefore be taken into account when part II of the Bill is implemented. That is now incorporated in the Bill in specific amendments which are comprehensive and consistent with other parts of the Bill.

Ms. Ruddock: For the record, we support the amendments that are being introduced at this stage. In Committee and at all stages, the Opposition have pressed for people with disabilities and for the organisations that represent them to be properly consulted. We regret that our other amendments dealing with organisations which represent persons who use any road to which the order relates—by which we meant organisations representing pedestrians, cyclists, or, indeed, the general public—did not find favour with the Government, although they were pressed in another place. The Government have chosen to single out people with disabilities, and we appreciate that positive discrimination, although other groups of road users should properly have been represented. However, we support the giving of a statutory right to disabled organisations to be consulted.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Clearly, I am pleased that the Government have accepted amendments that allow for groups representing people with disabilities to be consulted on a mandatory basis on the introduction of red routes. However, I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) said. We pressed in Committee for other groups to be consulted and I should have thought that they also have an important role to play.

Thus far, the experience of the introduction of traffic management schemes through red routes in London has been an unhappy one for many people with disabilities. On the opening day of the red route through Islington, the police attempted to take away the car of a disabled person. The stopping restrictions in operation along that route mean that many people with disabilities cannot get into shops which might have specific disabled access, because the stopping places are in the wrong place. If the Department of Transport had had the foresight to consult the Islington Disablement Association and other such groups at the time of the introduction of the route, much heartache would have been saved and many problems avoided. However, the Department's approach was arrogant—it decided what it was going to do and then waited to see what the effect would be. The effect has been greater speed and a higher volume of traffic and people with disabilities are now unable to go into shops that they should be able to use. Many small shops and businesses along the route are going out of business.

People with disabilities are one group that has been affected, but the removal of the right of people with disabilities to stop along much of the red route means that they try to park in side streets. However, the heavy emphasis placed on policing the red routes has meant that traffic wardens have been taken away from policing the side routes, so specifically designated disabled persons' parking bays on side routes adjoining Upper street, Holloway road and Archway road are often now congested by the vehicles of other people who park illegally. As all the emphasis is on getting traffic along the route, the real purpose of parking restrictions and facilities that benefit people with disabilities is lost.

What form does the Minister expect the consultation to take? How will organisations in specific localities be consulted about the possible introduction of a red route or about the parking facilities in neighbouring streets? To judge from our experience, there will be a lot of trouble for people with disabilities in other parts of London as the schemes are introduced.

6.15 pm

Mr. Chope: It was hoping for too much to expect the hon. Gentleman to be persuaded even at this stage of the success of the red route pilot scheme. I introduced new evidence which shows that as a result of the operation of the pilot scheme, there has been a significant reduction in road casualties during the two months that have so far been monitored. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that. In addition, more traffic is able to use that route with greater reliability and, as a result, less traffic uses unsuitable residential roads.

In Committee, we debated at considerable length the allegations and counter-allegations about the facts relating to individual disabled people on the route. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that many amendments have

been made to the route as a result of consultation before and after the initiation of the scheme and that all road users are the beneficiaries of the red route.

Mr. Corbyn: One cannot say that all road users are the beneficiaries of that route. Only last week, I met a group of young mothers of small children who frequently have to cross that road, and they are alarmed at the speed of the traffic along it because of what I suppose can be called the effective policing which ensures a greater movement of traffic. The principle behind the opposition in the locality to the red route has been that emphasis is placed on getting more traffic more quickly through a densely built-up urban area. We believe that the Department of Transport should place the emphasis on getting more people to use buses and trains and on persuading fewer people to use cars, which congest central London, docklands or the City.

I hope that the Minister will not ignore the fact that the facilities for people with disabilities have often been impaired because of the way in which the policing is carried out. How does the Minister propose to consult local groups that represent people with disabilities before the introduction of such routes elsewhere?

Mr. Chope: In the first instance, the consultation will be with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee and with any other groups which are recognised to represent the needs of disabled people. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree with that.

Many people use buses and as a result of the effectiveness of the red route the time taken for bus journeys has declined, which makes the bus a more attractive option. The evidence that I have given to the House about the reduction in the number of road casualties counters the hon. Gentleman's allegation—or his implication—that pedestrians on the route are at greater risk than before.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 54

Proposed action by London authorities likely to affect priority routes

Lords amendment: No. 35, in page 49, line 34, leave out from second "affect" to end of line 39 and insert "a priority route".

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, we may take Lords amendments Nos. 36, 126 and 140.

Mr. Chope: The amendments concern the quick procedures available to the London authorities under clause 54 and under paragraph 5 of schedule 5 to the Local Government Act 1985 to notify the traffic director of their proposals for minor, unforeseen road improvements on priority routes or designated roads.

Ms. Ruddock: I support the amendments. The Opposition tabled similar amendments in Committee, but they were rejected by the Government. We are especially delighted that the Government have now seen fit to accept our argument and the argument made in the other place, which is that the measures were originally too widely drawn. It is now clear that local authorities should notify the traffic director of their plans only if those plans affect priority routes. The restriction in the power of the traffic director to intervene in borough's road plans is very much appreciated by the local authorities that would be affected by the powers of the traffic director. The authorities, especially through the Association of London Authorities, have repeatedly expressed their concern about the way in which that person will operate. I am pleased to support the amendments, which will make life easier for those who will have to try to co-operate on transport planning in the city with the newly created traffic director as a consequence of the Bill.

Mr. Corbyn: I, too, welcome the small reduction in the potential powers of the traffic dictator for London. The Minister is smiling, so he must remember that those words were used often in Committee. The amendments introduce a minor change in an especially unpleasant piece of centralised government being imposed on the people of London. London lacks an elected local authority. Almost all the local authorities in the areas most affected by heavy traffic in inner London are poll tax-capped or restricted in some way. We now have a traffic director who is given enormous powers over traffic movements through those boroughs. That is fundamentally undemocratic.

Although I welcome the fact that the director's powers have been slightly curtailed in that he cannot now deal with every road that he may think fit to be affected by the introduction of a priority route scheme or a red route, we should put on record the fact that the traffic director is a wholly unwanted being. Instead, the people of London want an elected, democratic local authority which can make decisions in the interests of the people of London as a whole. They do not want a traffic dictator whose sole aim is to force yet more traffic through unwilling inner-London suburbs into an already overcrowded centre.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 59

Contravention of certain orders relating to parking places in London not to be criminal offence

Lords amendment: No. 40 in page 53, line 9, leave out "section" and insert "subsection".

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment corrects an error.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 60

Parking penalties in London

Lords amendment: No. 41, in page 54, line 3, leave out "25 per cent." and insert "the specified proportion".

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendment No. 42.

Mr. Chope: The amendment introduces some flexibility for local authorities over the amount of the discount that they can provide for prompt payment of the penalty charge.

Mr. Corbyn: I do not disagree with the amendment, but I believe that the principle is ridiculous. Local authorities should not be penalised by the director, who is not answerable to the people of London. A fundamentally undemocratic principle is being foisted on the House, yet again. Although I accept the modification of the original proposal because it is not as bad as it might have been, it does not mean that we willingly accept the principle of the right of the director to penalise local authorities.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 61

RECOVERY OF VEHICLES OR OF PROCEEDS OF DISPOSAL

Lords amendment: No. 43, in page 54, line 33, leave out from "storage" to end of line 34 and insert—

"of the vehicle—

(i) as the authority may require; or

(ii) in the case of sums payable to a competent authority which is not a local authority, as may be prescribed,"

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 44 and 45.

Mr. Chope: The amendments are technical. They make it clear that when a vehicle has been removed by the police in London, the recovery charges should be those applicable in respect of the police and not the London authorities.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 62

CHARGES FOR REMOVAL, STORAGE AND DISPOSAL OF VEHICLES

Lords amendment: No. 46, in page 55, line 16, leave out "9 or section" and insert "6, 9 or".

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Wtih this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 47, 48, 49 and 135.

Mr. Chope: The amendments introduce further changes to section 102 of the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 so that London authorities can charge owners for the removal, storage and disposal of vehicles that have contravened any order designating an on-street parking place or which are parked illegally at any local authority off-street parking place.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 63

IMMOBILISATION OF VEHICLES IN PARKING PLACES

Lords amendment: No. 50, in page 55, line 46, leave out "parking attendant" and insert

"person authorised by the relevant authority to give such a direction."

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 90, 91, 122, 123, 134 and 136.

Mr. Chope: The amendments fall into three main groups covering the flexibility of the London authorities and the police over authorising the release of vehicles from wheel clamps, new powers for the police to wheel-clamp and remove vehicles from suspended parking places and changes in the scope of regulations governing removal and wheel-clamping action by the police.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 66

APPOINTMENT OF PARKING ADJUDICATORS BY JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE LONDON AUTHORITIES

Lords amendment: No. 67, in page 59, line 15, leave out "statutory instrument make regulations" and insert "regulations make provision".

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 68 and 69.

Mr. Chope: Amendments Nos. 67 and 68 are technical. Amendment No. 69 requires the joint committee to publish a statutory annual report to the Secretary of State on the discharge by the parking adjudicators of their functions.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Before Clause 69

Lords amendment: No. 74, to insert the following new clause—*Enforcement*—

(".—(1) In this section—

"certificated bailiff", means any person authorised to act as such under subsection (6) below; and

"a Part II debt" means any sum which is—

(a) payable under, or by virtue of, any provision of this Part of this Act; and

(b) recoverable as if it were payable under a county court order.

(2) The Lord Chancellor may by order make provision—

(a) for warrants of excution in respect of Part II debts, or such class or classes of Part II debts as may be specified in the order, to be executed by certificated bailiffs;

(b) as to the requirements which must be satisfied before any person takes, with a view to enforcing the payment of—

(i) a Part II debt; or

(ii) such class or classes of Part II debts as may be so specified,

any other step of a kind specified by the order.

(3) Any such order may make such incidental and supplemental provision (including modifications of any

enactment other than this Act) as the Lord Chancellor considers appropriate in consequence of the provision made by that order under subsection (2) above.

(4) The Lord Chancellor may by regulations make provision in connection with the certification of bailiffs under this section and the execution of warrants of execution by such bailiffs.

(5) The regulations may, in particular, make provision—

(a) as to the security (if any) to be required from certificated bailiffs;

(b) as to the fees and expenses payable with respect to executions by certificated bailiffs; and

(c) for the suspension or cancellation of certificates issued under this section and with respect to the effect of any such suspension or cancellation.

(6) For the purposes of this section, a person is a certificated bailiff if he is authorised to act as such by a certificate signed—

(a) by a judge assigned to a county court district; or

(b) in such circumstances as may be specified in regulations made by the Lord Chancellor, by a district judge.

(7) Any person who is not a certificated bailiff but who purports to levy a distress as such a bailiff, and any person authorising him to levy it, shall be deemed to have committed a trespass.")

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment sets out in more detail the arrangements for the recovery of unpaid penalty charges and sums ordered to be paid by a parking adjudicator.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Schedule 2

Amendment of Schedule 2 to the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988

Lords amendment: No. 79, in page 69, line 6, at end insert—

(".In the entry relating to section 143 of that Act (using vehicle while uninsured or unsecured against third-party risks) in column 4 for the words "Level 4" there shall be substituted the words "Level 5".")

6.30 pm

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment..

The amendment relates to a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), who expressed concern about the scale of the problem of driving without insurance and asked for an increase in the penalties. The amendment is a positive response to his representations.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I appreciate the action that has been taken. It will be greatly appreciated by those who have expressed concern.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Schedule 3

Minor and consequential amendments

Lords amendment: No. 98, in page 75, line 3, at end insert—

".—(1) Section 41 of that Act (regulation of construction, weight, equipment and use of vehicles) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) at the end of paragraph (e) there shall be added the words "(by means of the fixing of plates or otherwise) and the circumstances in which they are to be marked,".

(3) In subsection (2) after paragraph (j) there shall be inserted—

"(jj) speed limiters,".

(4) After subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(4A) Regulations under this section with respect to speed limiters may include provision—

(a) as to the checking and sealing of speed limiters by persons authorised in accordance with the regulations and the making of charges by them,

(b) imposing or providing for the imposition of conditions to be complied with by authorised persons,

(c) as to withdrawal of authorisatiions." "

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 99, 100 and 142.

Mr. Chope: In the interests of road safety and fuel efficiency, we already require coaches to be fitted with speed limiters, and we have recently proposed that new heavy goods vehicles over 7·5 tonnes gross weight should be fitted with limiters.

The reason for introducing this amendment is to enable us to exercise control over the way speed limiters are calibrated. If they are to fulfil their function of restricting the speed of vehicles to the motorway speed limits, or to any lower speed selected by the vehicle operators, they must be properly installed and calibrated to the characteristics of the particular vehicle. That is best achieved in a workshop specially equipped for the purpose.

The amendment would enable the Secretary of State to require the checking and sealing of speed limiters only by persons authorised by him. That means that only an authorised person would be able to seal the system against tampering, but before doing that he would have to ensure that the speed limiter was properly connected and also that it had been calibrated at or below the speed limit. It would enable the Secretary of State to impose conditions to be complied with by the people authorised to check speed limiters; to set charges; and to withdraw authorisations —for example, if they failed to meet the necessary standards.

In addition, the amendment would make it an offence to forge a speed limiter seal or any plate containing particulars required to be marked by the construction and use regulations. It would also make it an offence to impersonate a person authorised to check and seal speed limiters.

I commend the amendments to the House as a necessary means of ensuring that speed limiters function correctly in practice and that there are reasonable safeguards against tampering or other interference.

Ms. Ruddock: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will appreciate the consensus that has been arrived at during the passage of the Bill and the way in which the Opposition have been able to support and commend the amendments from the other place. This may be my last opportunity to express an opinion on the measures remaining in the Bill. I therefore wish to record the Opposition's support for Lords amendment No. 98.

[Ms. Ruddock]

We have no doubt that the limiting of the speed of heavy goods vehicles and coaches has been an important step in terms of road safety. All of us who use our roads are constantly concerned about the way in which speed limits are breached. Such breaches are more serious where large numbers of people are being carried, as on coaches, or where the weight of vehicles is important, as with heavy goods vehicles. Any measures to ensure that proposals to limit speed work effectively are welcome. The Opposition very much welcome the amendment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I agree with the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock). There have been significant improvments to the Bill and amendment No. 98 about speed limiting is important, but its importance must be kept in perspective.

The number of people who have been killed and seriously injured has fallen dramatically over the decades —there has been a 25 per cent. drop in the number of serious injuries in relation to the distance travelled over the past three or four years—and that is a tribute to using measures that work. One of the things which distinguish this country from other European countries is that we tend not to have a blind political response to every tragedy that is drawn to our attention.

There are times when, sadly, people are killed, but in circumstances that are unlikely to recur and in circumstances where legislating against behaviour would not make much difference. It is also important to realise that, when the Transport and Road Research Laboratory or other bodies carry out pilot schemes or collect data for analysis—it is analysis rather than proscription that is important—it is possible to introduce measures which are likely to receive more public understanding and more likely to have an effect because they will work.

Limiting the speed of heavy vehicles is unlikely to reduce the number of crashes, but it is likely to reduce the consequences of those crashes. As we discussed earlier, some measures will reduce the number of crashes. Mixing together the virtue of reducing the causes and consequences of crashes is part of the job of people working in the area of road casualty reduction.

It is important to continue to exert as much effort as possible and to devote as many resources as possible to identifying the changing and continuing patterns of crashes and of people's behaviour leading to 5,000 to 5,500 deaths and 270,000 to 300,000 injuries every year.

About five or six years ago the Government set a target of cutting the number of injuries and fatalities by one third by the year 2000. I now believe that that target was mistaken. It should have been a reduction of one third in relation to distance travelled and a reduction of one third, if possible, in absolute numbers of deaths and serious injuries.

The number of slight injuries will be determined by the number of vehicles on the road, which may cause the numbers to increase, but we can continue to have a great deal of success in dealing with the number of deaths and serious injuries. I do not wish to stray beyond the bounds of amendment No. 98 by saying more than a word about the dramatic decrease in the incidence of drink-driving since 1967, when Barbara Castle first began to take the issue seriously. It took the public some years to catch up with the legislation.

It became law for adults to wear seat belts in the rear of vehicles a week ago. That will not just save 100 lives; it will save half the lives that would otherwise be lost if people sitting in the rear of cars——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not pursue that line. I do not see it anywhere in the amendments.

Mr. Bottomley: The second part of that sentence—to take your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker and to continue what I hope to say—applies equally well to cutting the effective speeds of heavy goods vehicles, which is the point of the amendment. When the United States lifted its federal ban on legal speeds of more than 55 mph, in some states in the first six months the number of deaths on the equivalent of our motorways rose by more than 40 per cent.

We have a high disregard for speed limits in this country. In general, people will not pay attention to them unless there is a semi-automatic enforcement, such as speed limiters or cameras on motorway bridges so that someone who drives at excessive speed from, say, Bristol to Birmingham will receive a ticket or account stating, "You have persistently exceeded the speed limit—please pay £100 for the journey." That is the kind of excess speed road pricing which might work.

It is unacceptable for 12 to 14 people to die on our roads each day. It is very boring to say common-sense things, whether or not they apply to the families who tragically died in a crash in Scotland at the weekend, but we must continue to make the point that those 12 to 14 deaths per day, most of which never even make the newspapers, matter just as much as deaths on the railways or in air crashes.

I do not want to say that the Government could do a great deal more—the Government and local authorities are doing an immense amount—but, within the bounds of order, I wish to make it plain that heavy goods vehicles which do not exceed the speed limit will make as much difference as persuading all cyclists that it is not just good style but common sense to wear helmets, because whoever caused the crashes, 80 per cent. of dead cyclists died only because of head injuries, and 80 per cent. of those head injuries could have been prevented by wearing a helmet. Motorcyclists, especially those under 21, could find themselves as safe as drivers of heavy goods vehicles with speed——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us get back to the Lords amendment, please.

Mr. Bottomley: On the speed limit, inexperienced drivers seldom drive heavy goods vehicles at or above the speed limit. What they tend to learn through experience could be shared by others. If we could find ways not just of lecturing pedestrians who are involved in crashes, not necessarily with heavy goods vehicles travelling at more than their legal speed limit, we shall find that this is the safest country in the world, leaving aside those in which people do not drink and do not have motor vehicles. We could continue to cut the casualty rate by 5 per cent. or 10 per cent. year after year. In a relatively civilised country, we should be able to get road deaths down to below 4,000 a year by the year 2000. We shall not know which families will have been saved tears, but we shall be able to say that our statistics prove that we have been effective.

Mr. Fearn: This is an excellent Bill. We did an awful lot in Committee. The Minister will recollect that I referred to speed limiters and their manufacturers. I asked whether speed limiter inspections are to be made in factories or whether they will be left to inspectors from the Department of Transport, who will wait until speed limiters are fitted to vehicles before determining that a speed limiter is accurate and working.

Mr. Gale: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the amendments that he has been able to accept and for his undertakings in Committee and in the House, which have been honoured in another place. There is no doubt that they have made a considerable improvement to the Bill.

As a Kent Member, I am particularly concerned, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) about the speed at which heavy goods vehicles travel on our roads between the channel ports and London. The matter seriously affects our constituents. For that reason, I certainly welcome the steps that were taken in another place to tighten controls on heavy goods vehicles and to introduce the limiters that we believe will assist in the control of lorries within the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Minister has taken this point on board and I hope that he will pursue it in future, but it will not be enough simply to control the speeds of United Kingdom lorries—we must make sure that the speeds of heavy continental lorries, in particular, are also controlled if our roads are to be genuinely and fully safe, as we would all wish them to be.

Mr. Corbyn: Like others, I welcome any improvement in road safety and anything that can be done to reduce the speed of heavy goods vehicles and coaches in particular. I cannot be the only person who, when travelling along a motorway, has been truly frightened by the size and speed of very large double-decker buses swaying in the wind in the third lane and travelling at obviously excessive speeds. Bearing in mind the timetables of some coaches, they have to break the speed limit to adhere to them. I hope that the Minister will bear that point in mind and consider the commercial pressures on some coach operators.

Additionally, there is a large number of heavy freight vehicles, not just on motorways but on dual carriageways and urban roads. Those vehicles are powerful—they have to be—and they are fast. They often travel at way over the speed limit, which is incredibly dangerous. The speeds at which they travel and their distance from each other are extremely dangerous. Also, cars or lorries overtaking on the inside are dangerous.

6.45 pm

I hope that, in accepting the amendments, which will obviously improve matters relating to speed, the Minister will give us some hope that there will be vigorous prosecution of offences and investigation of background causes, which are often pressure on lorry drivers to maintain unrealistic timetables and the unrealistic expectations that are imposed upon them. Exactly the same often applies to coaches operating to timetables.

Although the amendment does not refer to speed limiters on cars, there is something slightly odd in that we not only advertise but encourage the advertisement of cars and other road vehicles which are capable of travelling at more than twice the speed limit on major roads. Something must be done about that. As the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) pointed out, when speed restrictions on motorways in the United States were lifted, the casualty rate went up. That was inevitable. Those who talk about raising speed limits on British motorways should consider the statistics in the United States. It is a crazy notion. We should not allow the number of deaths on our roads to continue.

It has been pointed out that little publicity is given to road deaths. That is an important point. If there is a train crash and 20 people are killed, quite rightly there is outrage. Quite rightly, there is deep concern about the safety of the railway system and the competence of the operators, inquiries are mounted, and so on. That is absolutely right, but the same attitude is not taken to road deaths. If there is a major crash involving a coach carrying a large number of civilian casualties, there is some publicity for it, but the average death on the road might just get a footnote in a local paper—it is not regarded as a serious matter. I hope that we can encourage the media to be much more vigorous in reporting the number of deaths which occur on our roads as there is carnage on a massive scale.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman helpfully mentioned the media. Does he agree that it might be sensible to have a closer association between the cause and the consequence? Does he agree that it would be very sensible for such issues to be a matter of public knowledge? If there is a crash, fatal or otherwise, and if there is evidence of a vehicle, especially a heavy goods vehicle, in line with the amendment, travelling above the legal speed limit, should not that information be made publicly available as soon as it is known to the police or the authorities, rather than being kept back to produce as a surprise at a coroner's inquest or a court case?

By extension, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would also be sensible for the fact that a driver had been drinking to be put on the public record within hours or days of the crash rather than waiting until everyone has forgotten and the crash has moved from the front page to page 5 of the local paper?

Mr. Corbyn: That is a good point. I can think of horrific accidents which, it has later transpired, have been caused by drunken driving. That fact has not appeared until a long time later, when the issue has passed from the public mind. One must be cautious that the papers do not prejudge whatever prosecution may take place against a driver, but it is reasonable to publicise the fact that a charge of speeding or drunken driving has been laid.

The media should think much more carefully about this issue. As I have said, there is rightly great concern about rail and other transport crashes, but little concern about the deaths on our roads or about road safety. Perhaps the Minister will consider publishing the statistics in a different form, and detailing the causes behind road accidents. If his Department used a different form of publicity, people might be more aware of the problem. It is only when one meets a family who have been bereaved by a road crash, whatever the cause, that one begins to realise the real horror of the situation.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to all hon. Members who have participated in the debate for their support for these road safety provisions. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) and for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) for their support throughout

[Mr. Chope]

the passage of this important Bill. I am grateful also to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) for both her kind comments and her co-operation——

Mr. Corbyn: What about me?

Mr. Chope: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

It is not every day that the House can consider 144 amendments in such a relatively short time.

I should now like to thank the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) for his considerable contributions to our debate. We have not agreed on everything, but his contributions have always been succinct and to the point. I am grateful to him for that. Nor shall I forget the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), who has been in his place throughout our debate today and was a persistent and regular attender in Committee. Nobody could ask for more.

I hope that the House will accept the Lords amendment.

Mr. Corbyn: Is there any possibility of the Minister's Department changing the form of its presentation of road accident statistics so that there can be greater public understanding of the danger and loss of life resulting from road accidents?

Mr. Chope: We are always prepared to look at new ways of presenting statistics. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham is joining the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) in holding a celebration at the Royal Automobile Club either next week or the week after specifically to draw attention to the enormous progress that has been made in the past three or four years in reducing the terrible toll on our roads. Neither my hon. Friend nor anybody else is complacent about the situation. If we can further draw the attention of the public to the need to adopt road safety measures, that is all the better.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Schedule 5

PARKING PENALTIES

Lords amendment: No. 104, in page 89, line 3, leave out from "serve" to end of line 4 and insert "a notice ('a notice to owner') on the person who appears to them to have been the owner of the vehicle when the alleged contravention occurred."

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 105 to 120.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Can my hon. Friend advise the House whether the amendment was one of the recommendations of the North committee and, whether or not it was, will he take this opportunity to place on the record what was said earlier in the Bill's passage—that many of those who gave advice to the Government should be pleased with the progress that has been made because their detailed work has been the foundation of much of part I? That fact should be recorded as we approach the end of our deliberations on the Lords amendments.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

RIGHTS OF THE SUBJECT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Access to Personal Files (Social Services) (Amendment) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

HUMAN FERTILISATION AND EMBRYOLOGY

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order NO. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Special Exemptions) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Computer Services for Members

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

6.54 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Many of those interested in the provision of computer services to hon. Members will probably have groaned inwardly and silently when the Leader of the House stated that the House would debate the fourth report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) of Session 1989-90 tonight, on the grounds that it would come on at a late hour. Clearly, the Leader of the House knew something that we did not.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for finding the time to debate the report, because I know that many Select Committee and other reports vie for time for debate on the Floor of the House, and not all are successful. Therefore, speaking as the Chairman of the Computer Sub-Committee, I am grateful to the Leader of the House for finding time for the debate this evening.

I know that we are debating this matter on a motion for the Adjournment, but I hope that we shall hear from the Leader of the House that, as long as there is general approval for the unanimous recommendations of the report, the right hon. Gentleman will move to expedite its recommendations and to put into motion the work that can be started immediately to improve services for hon. Members.

Almost exactly six years ago—in July 1985—the House debated an earlier report from the Services Committee on the same subject, also on the motion for the Adjournment. Sadly, no action was taken on the recommendations in that report, but I hope that we shall have more success following our deliberations this evening. Six years on, we are debating a much more modest set of proposals about the use of computers by hon. Members.

The report originated with the Computer Sub-Committee, the Chairmanship of which I inherited from my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). The Sub-Committee is concerned with the provision of computer services for Members and Officers. It meets only rarely, but nevertheless it has done important work on behalf of the House. It is worth noting that the budget for expenditure on computers for staff in the House totals £3·2 million for the current financial year, but that there is no budget for the provision of computers from central funds for Members. That is an eloquent comment. We are obviously willing to invest significant sums for services for Officers, but nothing like the same approach has been taken yet on behalf of Members.

I have described the report as "modest"—and it is certainly much more modest than I would have liked. I make extensive use of computers in my own offices, here and elsewhere. I know that some people manage without them, but I find it hard to understand how. As Chairman of the Computer Sub-Committee, I was persuaded to seek a unanimous report—to go for a consensus report—and to achieve the support of hon. Members of all parties; that is what I did, and we are now considering the report.

The appearance of the motion on the Order Paper a full year after the report was approved—I suppose that by parliamentary standards that counts as expedition—encourages me to think that, on the one hand, I am fortunate, but that, on the other hand, the other Select Committee proposed by the Leader of the House—a Committee on procedures in the House—cannot come a moment too soon.

The report builds on the work of the Computer Sub-Committee during the 1983 Parliament. That Sub-Committee was ably and enthusiastically chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), and its report, "Information Technology: Members' Requirements", was agreed in December 1984 and debated in July 1985. The report drew on the results of a detailed study by The Economist intelligence unit on Members' information technology needs.

The 1984 report proposed the phased introduction of a local cable network based on broad-band cabling throughout the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings, with a view to giving all Members, their staff and the Departments of the House access to centrally generated information services such as POLIS and a wide range of commercial services and databases.

During the debate on the report, suggestions were made that the Sub-Committee had not consulted widely enough among Members at large. Other criticisms, too, were made, including some rather cranky views, such as that Members did not really need computer systems or word processing, and that those who did were a tiny minority. It would be nice to think that those ideas had bitten the dust, not least because, for our most recent study, we again examined Members' circumstances so as fully to inform the work of the Sub-Committee before producing our report.

For example, we conducted another survey along almost identical lines to the earlier survey. The results are summarised in paragraphs 14 to 16 of our report, and are set out in more detail in page 13, at the back of the volume. They show what can be described only as a staggering increase in the use of computers by Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): As the hon. Gentleman said, the report is already a year old. Does he have any more recent information on that trend?

Dr. Cunningham: I have only anecdotal evidence, but it all suggests increasing use of computer systems of various kinds by Members and their staff. It is impossible to keep updating the information in reports in the hope that one day they might be debated on the Floor of the House. I take the intention of the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) to be supportive, in that he agrees that those important developments continue to gather momentum.

Of the 355 Members who returned the questionnaire, 293 were already using computerised equipment of some kind and a further 21 were planning to do so. Even if no account is taken of the non-respondents, more than a year ago 48 per cent. of all Members and a clear majority of Back Benchers had entered the world of the late 20th century and introduced some kind of information technology appliance into their offices. In other words, the use of computers and word processors had increased threefold in the five years between the earlier report and the report now before the House.

The basic point is clear. When the Sub-Committee discusses Members' information technology needs, we are not hypothesising about something that will happen in the future: we are talking about what has already happened and is a continuing trend. A majority of Members now use

[Dr. Cunningham]

computer systems, as, of course, do all modern businesses, educational establishments and people in industry, commerce and administration throughout Whitehall. The House is engaged in a catching-up exercise on behalf of Members, in the interests not only of more efficient offices here—and, one hopes, more effective scrutiny of Ministers from time to time—but of providing a more efficient service on behalf of our constituents.

Computers and word processors are now almost a routine part of office life in Westminster, and I hope that we shall agree tonight that we need to take certain steps —I emphasise that they are modest steps—to regularise the situation. The House has a responsibility to decide how best those formidable services can be provided for Members, and what we can do collectively to help colleagues to take full advantage of what computer systems have to offer.

We accept that the priority is the need to provide proper offices for Members. Like many other Members in the Chamber today, I have been in the House a long time, yet we still have not achieved the modest goal of providing an office for each Member. I accept that as an objective of the House administration, but we should also accept the need to provide proper computer and information technology systems for all Members.

I acknowledge the debt that we owe the Leader of the House and his immediate predecessor for adopting a new and more energetic approach to improving the workings of the House in all its aspects. However, in this case, the most remarkable aspect of the growth in the use of computers by Members is that it has happened entirely as a result of individual decisions. Members have acted on their own behalf, not because of any collective decision or provision at Westminster.

Of course, the piecemeal approach has had a price in terms of public expenditure. First, there is no guarantee that the equipment bought through the office costs allowance is the best available, the most suitable in the circumstances, or the best value for money. Secondly, piecemeal individual purchases of computers, word processors and fax machines guarantees that, in terms of public expenditure, the worst bargain is probably struck.

As paragraph 31 of the report explains:

"no other large scale user of computers (whether in industry or in government) would countenance off-the-shelf purchase at standard retail prices when contemplating the acquisition of many hundreds of machines."

Yet that is how equipment is provided here. People make individual decisions and go out and acquire what they think is the best buy off the shelf. If bulk purchasing were available, the cost to the public purse would be significantly reduced, without necessarily eliminating choice for Members. The same considerations apply to the maintenance of equipment.

Page 34 of the report describes the Computer Officer of the House as suggesting that savings of at least 30 per cent. could be made by central purchasing of computers. He cites a saving of almost 70 per cent. in maintenance costs if there were some collective provision.

Thirdly, Members buy expensive equipment, yet often use it only in routine and basic ways, such as for word processing, keeping personal records and filing, whereas they could use the same equipment to tap into the vast amount of information available on public and commercial databases.

That happens because we have failed collectively to provide an efficient system whereby all our machines could talk to each other and use the computerised information systems available in the House, in Government and in the outside world. So there is huge under-utilisation of even the resources that we have.

The Sub-Committee's report makes a number of proposals to address the inadequacies of the present system. As I said, they are extremely modest proposals. My personal preference would be for the House to accept full responsibility for the provision of computers and associated equipment for all Members' offices and to establish a comprehensive network to support the machines. However, I have been persuaded that, for the time being, we should not seek such an all-embracing and comprehensive approach—hence the line taken in the report.

Our first proposals are designed to ensure that there is proper provision in the Palace and outbuildings for the transmission of computer data between Members' offices, and between Members' offices and the wide range of data services now available. We therefore propose, at paragraph 44, that discussions should be held between the Parliamentary Works Office, the Computer Officer—to whom I pay tribute for his excellent work in servicing the Committee and in providing advice and information to the House more widely—the Communications Manager, the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency and appropriate commercial contractors, to identify the type and capacity of cable required to meet the long-term needs of the House for the transmission of both data and television signals.

A consultants' study of the recabling of the House and surrounding buildings for staff services and the annunciator service has already been commissioned. That is an important and useful development, but it is also important to recognise that we shall need to recable the House for the annunciator and Library services and for other services. It would be nonsense and short-sighted not to take into account, before that decision is made, the needs of hon. Members for information technology services. We would expect the consultations to lead to an early decision to introduce a new broad-band cable throughout the Palace and the outbuildings which would meet the needs of the House for the foreseeable future.

There are additional reasons for introducing such a cable, not directly connected with computers. The Services Committee has recently been under great pressure from hon. Members who understandably want access to terrestrial, satellite and cable television in their offices. Some hon. Members already have access to some of those services in existing buildings, but the majority have not. Moreover, from October, those hon. Members who are lucky enough to have palaces in phase 1 of the new building—[HON. MEMBERS: "Palaces?"] I meant "offices"; it was a slip of the tongue. It may be a palace, but it is no prize.

Such hon. Members will already have annunciator screens doubling as conventional television sets that can carry all terrestrial television services and one or two satellite services. In the rest of the buildings, the annunciator system is now antique and is extremely expensive to operate and maintain, especially given that

every single replacement has to be tailormade because the existing annunciator screens can no longer be bought off the shelf.

A new cable throughout the buildings would therefore serve three separate and important functions: to link Members' computers into what could develop into a computer network; to provide all Members' offices with access to commercial television services; and to provide the framework for the replacement of the annunciator system.

The Committee's second main proposal, at paragraph 57 of the report, is for the establishment of a working party to draw up specifications for the interfaces required between Members' work stations and the cable system, and to draw up a list of approved types of computers, word processors and other standard office equipment. Among others, the working party would include representatives of the Library, whose POLIS system is the most obvious readily available database to which hon. Members may wish to have access. The vast majority of hon. Members who replied to the questionnaire last year wanted access to the POLIS service.

Such provision may in itself cut public expenditure by reducing the cost of Members' gaining access to the information that they require. For example, many questions may not need to be tabled, and the necessity for reports to be commissioned on behalf of Members' may be eliminated. That means that there is a potential benefit in cost terms, too.

A list of approved equipment would be the first tentative move towards the standardisation of equipment in Members' offices and, as the report says at paragraph 60,

"would be an interim stage towards the likely ultimate objective of transferring responsibility for the purchase of Members' basic equipment from the individual Member to a central fund".

At that interim stage, we could begin to see the advantage of central purchasing and maintenance under an arrangement which allowed Members to buy equipment through a central agency, preferably the Computer Officer, and to buy into standard maintenance and training contracts, thus saving considerable sums.

The report goes on to say that the House may well wish in future to take the "final step" towards the central ownership and maintenance of computerised office equipment, but that is not recommended now; nor is it an inevitable consequence of what the Committee proposes.

I remind the House, however, that such a move would not exactly be revolutionary. It is the common practice in many Commonwealth and European Parliaments, and as long ago as 1987, the Top Salaries Review Body expressed the view

"that there would be considerable advantages in the central provision of equipment by the House, especially in terms of standardisation and bulk buying".

For the time being, we do not propose that the House should go down that road, and we respect the right of those hon. Members who wish to continue to bang out their constituency mail on ancient manual typewriters or to have the right not to be connected into any on-line information system. The fact that the equipment is there in Members' offices and ready to tap into does not mean that Members are obliged to use it.

However, an agreement that only certain types of equipment may be purchased through the office costs allowance would be a small step in the right direction, because it would mean that we could move towards compatible systems throughout the House. It would also probably not be that painful for individual Members. Our survey last year suggested that the overwhelming majority —93 per cent.—of computer equipment was already IBM PC-compatible, so a good deal of basic standardisation is already taking place through hon. Members' own decisions.

The House will be wondering what all this will cost. When I took over the chairmanship of the Computer Sub-Committee, I was warned that cost would be the big stumbling block in the way of anything that we thought of proposing. Since then, the Parliamentary Works Office has done some basic sums for us in March this year, it concluded that about £1·5 million would provide us with a new cable, completely new annunciators capable of carrying television pictures, and facilities for connecting all equipment to the cable. Given that the annunciator system is now life-expired and will have to be replaced, by the Government's own admission, in the next few years, the total sum about which we are talking is relatively tiny.

Let me put the sum of £1·5 million into a wider context. The Members' pay and allowances vote for 1991-92 is £57·5 million. The vote for the House of Commons administration is £44·25 million and the parliamentary works vote is £29·36 million. Set beside those sums, £1·5 million to purchase the kind of cabling that we suggest —some of which will be necessary in any event—is a modest sum, and no one could describe it as an outrageous drain on public expenditure.

In return for that sum, the House would acquire the basic framework into which we could build a computer and communications network to suit the changing demands of Members during the next few decades. It seems to me a small price to pay, and the taxpayer would be getting better value for his money than under the present arrangements for such expenditure. Of course, the ultimate objective—which may not gain favour with every hon. Member—is more effective scrutiny by Members of what happens here, and more effective representation of our constituents.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that spending that amount of money would undoubtedly bring significant savings? For example, telephone bills would be much smaller because people would use far fewer outside lines to get back into what they could access internally.

Dr. Cunningham: I am happy to agree with that point, although it is difficult to quantify the gains at this stage. When I was elected 21 years ago, Members did not even have their own telephones. There may even have been a time when Members provided their own telephones. I do not know whether that is the case. Perhaps I should ask the Library to check. It seems preposterous now to propose that a telephone cabling system should not be provided for our use and the use of our staff. I am sure that, in a few years, when people look back, they will see that we took an inordinately long time to modernise the way in which we provide information to Members and researchers.

I believe that the Leader of the House will want to respond positively to the report, as he has responded positively to other suggestions for improvements and progress in the way in which the House manages its affairs. I certainly hope that he will respond positively. The most positive step that he could take would be to make it clear

[Dr. Cunningham]

that, following this debate, he will initiate the necessary action with the House of Commons Commission and other committees to make progress on implementing the recommendations.

The report concludes in paragraph 68:

"The House cannot continue to adopt a wholly amateur approach to the use of new technologies which are already the standard tools of work in industry, business, education and government services of all kinds throughout the developed world".

Members' actions show that we believe that there is a need to move forward and become more professional in our approach. All that is needed is the collective will on the part of the Government and the House of Commons Commission to allow that more professional approach to be adopted.

We do not expect Members to rig up their own telephone lines, as I said a few moments ago. We should no longer expect them to rig up their own computer systems. From time to time—indeed, more regularly than ever as the general election approaches—I talk to business men and women who look forward to a change of Government. While they do not all necessarily support my view, they have one view in common when they come to the House. They never cease to be amazed at the quaintness and faded gentility of the place and the appalling lack of services and facilities in the offices in which we work to represent them, their employees and our constituents. In the main, they go away thinking that Parliament is always at the forefront of demands that other organisations, establishments and groups reform themselves. In this respect, as in some others, they think that it is about time that we reformed ourselves for a change.

7.22 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Until he made his last few comments, I had been about to say that I entirely agreed with everything that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said. Clearly, I must dissociate myself from the only mistake in his whole speech. He will not win the next election. However, I am sure that he will take everything else in the spirit that I intend. I support everything that he said about the matter that we are debating.

When I first entered the House in 1987, I was luckier than many of my colleagues, in that I had used a word processor before. Apart from that, I was computer-illiterate. I suppose that there are those who would say that I am illiterate, but for the purposes of this debate let us settle for computer-illiterate.

As all my colleagues will know, when I first arrived I was provided with a desk, a telephone, two filing cabinets and a not ungenerous office allowance. But otherwise, I was utterly and completely on my own. Four years later, I have two Amstrad minicomputers, a word processing package, a database and a modem link to the Parliamentary On-Line Information System. I hasten to add that I am one of just 49 Members who have taken advantage of the opportunity to be linked up directly to POLIS. To this day, I am slightly amazed that all that technology works. Whether it works well is a different matter, but I am constantly amazed that it works.

It is clear to me that my computer equipment enables me to do things that I could not possibly do otherwise. However, I am conscious that I am not getting the best even from my fairly small basic personal computer. There are still things that I do not understand about my word processing package. Many a time when I am using it, someone comes along and says, "Why are you doing that? All that you need to do is the other." I am still learning, four years on.

I know now that, when I set up on my own small database which I had bought off the shelf, I did not do it properly. Some 10,000 records later it is rather difficult to alter. But perhaps someone knows different and can tell me how to alter it—one of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. I have yet to get to grips with POLIS.

To obtain all that equipment set me—or the taxpayer—back £5,000. I have not the faintest idea whether it was good value for money. I have no means and no knowledge to test that. Such a tangle does the mother of Parliaments no credit whatever. When other people can put men on the moon, many an office in the House still has steam-driven typewriters, as the hon. Gentleman said. It really is not good enough.

Therefore, I welcome the debate and I support the proposals in the report. However, I am appalled that nothing seemed to be done after the debate in 1985. I hope that this time we shall not have a rerun of what happened then. In supporting the report, I wish to explain three matters as they seem to me. I shall state, first, why I believe that we need to change; secondly, what seems sensible for us to do; and, thirdly, how we should make those changes.

The reasons why we need to make the changes have been well set out in the report and by the hon. Gentleman. If we follow his Committee's recommendations we shall end up as better legislators and better representatives of our constituents, irrespective of our party. We and other people will be able to judge whether the money we spend gives us value for money.

How would we become better legislators? First, we would be better informed. It is amazing that events can take place in the world outside and we do not know about them. My leg is always pulled when I complain that I do not have access to television. People say that all that I want to do is stay up late at night and watch what I read about in the newspapers. But I can work here all day and not know the first thing about some major news item, because I am confined to the Chamber or my office. I do not regularly have access to the world outside. If we were better informed, we should be better legislators.

Secondly, it would be easier for all of us to do research. The hon. Gentleman said that there would be fewer demands on House of Commons staff. I am convinced that that is right. I am very conscious of how often I ask other people to do something which I know could be done more simply if only I had the means to do so. There would be enormous savings. We would also be encouraged to do more research. Sometimes I am reluctant to use the time of a member of the Library staff to research a matter which I consider interesting but relatively trivial compared with the demands of others. We would be able to do more and better research if we could do it ourselves.

One advantage about which the Government—whatever party is in power; this is not a party political point—may not be so keen is that we would be better legislators because the system would bring us closer to the Government and the Departments. It would make us much more able to ask questions, exchange information and go back and ask again. We would no longer have to

exchange interminable letters and wait a long time for the replies. We would be better legislators if we were closer to the Government.

Why would we be better representatives? I am sure that, given a system that we all understood and could plug into, we would give our constituents a quicker and fuller response to their inquiries. We would be in a much better position to seek help from them if we could communicate with people. We would find it much easier to communicate with our constituents. How often are we criticised for being remote and out of touch? It would be easier for constituents to communicate with us.

I know of 10-year-old constituents who are capable of faxing information who are amazed when I look blank and say that such things do not happen here. We have all known occasions when people want to fax important information to us and we have scratched our heads and replied that we are not sure how that could be done. If we had a cabling system, as proposed by the hon. Member for Copeland, we should be better able to communicate with our constituents and they with us.

Value for money is important. If the proposed system was installed, we could make better use of our time. At the moment, there is a quaint tradition of pieces of paper rushing around the Palace after us. I pay great tribute to those who try to find us in appalling circumstances, but it does us no credit that we communicate with each other in this place by means of little bits of paper. Sometimes they do not catch up with us for several days.

The new system would also make better use of the time of our staff. How many of us have had to dispatch someone from Abbey gardens, to Dean's yard, Norman Shaw North or to the Palace? If one totted up the amount of time spent obtaining information it would be clear that obtaining it via the cable system suggested by the hon. Member for Copeland would represent a sensible saving of taxpayers' money.

I am equally convinced that we would use our allowances in a different way if the new facilities were introduced. Bulk purchasing would save money, as would the standardisation of equipment. I am also sure that there would be less wastage. I do not know whether some of the things that I did were a waste of money, but I am sure that others have done what they thought to be right only to discover, through no fault of their own, that their system is not compatible with others. They may discuss the matter with colleagues and discover that, had they done so earlier, they would have done things differently.

We may argue about whether we can quantify the cost of telephone calls—the hon. Member for Copeland is right that we may be unable to do so—but I am certain that the proposed new system would result in getting more from the same amount of expenditure. I am sure that that would happen even if we did not reduce the individual allowance to pay for the central funding of the system. I believe that, under the new system, we would get more from the current level of expenditure and that is just as important as a value-for-money exercise, as is one to discover ways in which to spend less.

What should we do? Certainly we should do more than we did in 1985. However, we should do nothing until we have wired up the system. No matter how hard an individual may beaver away, we cannot do anything until we are linked with the central system. The wiring up of the system must be top of the list.

Standardised, specially designed equipment is just as important as the ability to bulk purchase. The word processing packages, mail boxes, message systems and diary systems should be specially designed for us and centrally available. We must also have a comprehensive database system. POLIS is all right up to a point, but it simply tells us where to look in *Hansard* for what we want —it does not tell us what is in *Hansard*. A comprehensive database system would go way beyond POLIS, useful though that is.

We should ensure that all the facilities can be accessed from each of our constituencies—that important point was not stressed in the report. Increasingly, individual Members are taking the view, often rightly, that a better service to constituents can be given if staff are based in the constituency rather than here. Whatever we set up in the Palace, it must be readily accessed from our constituencies.

We must ensure that help is provided for all hon. Members. When I came to the House, I considered myself lucky, as I knew a little about word processing. We must establish a proper system to help hon. Members make better use of the equipment available. They should understand what they might need in the future. The starting point for that system must be an invitation for bids for its design and development. Despite what the report says, I do not want another in-house Committee to be established which will run for years. It is no good hon. Members scratching their heads about what will happen next. We should go to the experts straight away. They should design and develop what we need for the future.

We should set up a central purchasing system as quickly as possible because, even if we do not follow some of the other proposals, that would be a sensible step ahead. We must establish urgently advisory as well as training services for hon. Members and their staff—it is probably more important to train our staff to use the equipment. That training and advice must be basic as well as advanced and readily accessible to all.

I have explained why I believe that we should support the report and why the Government should take firm action. I believe that that action will make us better legislators and better representatives. It would also help us to achieve better value for money. It only remains for me to comment on when we should act—in a word, now. If we leave it just for a moment, it will be too late. The longer we wait, the greater the waste. The longer we wait, the longer constituents will go on receiving less than the ideal service that they have every right to expect. The longer we wait, the longer we will miss an important opportunity to enable us to ensure that our legislation is of the highest quality. We pass up such an opportunity at our peril.

7.36 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): My speech will echo largely what has already been said. The work that has been done by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and his Sub-Committee is to be warmly welcomed. It is not typical of him to have such radical notions about making fast progress—that is in no sense a criticism—but I wish that he had used his considerable energy and resourcefulness to push the conclusions of the report further. However, he has explained his reasons, and I accept them.

I agree with the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) that we are not talking about a minor, technical

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

matter. We must decide whether such new services would make us better legislators and more readily acessible to the outside world. I have been a Member of the House for two Parliaments—other hon. Members have been here much longer—and even in that time I have noticed a dramatic increase in the volume of paper that is pushed across our desks. It is difficult to be sure that one has dealt conscientiously with all that paper unless one has the best and most modern information technology systems available.

I do not believe that it is particularly difficult to work out what we need. The work of the Committee has been signal in that regard, as it has identified that we need a broad-band cable network throughout the precincts of the Palace and outstations such as Norman Shaw North.

The hon. Member for Copeland was right to say that some of the work could be done in parallel with other projects—for example, the replacement of the annunciator system. I hope that the Government will be able to take decisions quickly enough to achieve the cost benefits that would accrue from cabling the network and replacing the annunciator system quickly. Presumably that means that that would be done within months rather than years.

We have already had a delay of six years since the last report, which is a great shame. I do not know who is to blame for that, and I know that processes in this place work exceedingly slow, but we shall stand condemned of unconscionable delay if we do not seize the moment to make the progress that the Committee indentified as possible.

The Committee report makes a telling point when it alludes to what is being done in sister parliaments on the other side of the Atlantic and in Europe. Although the precedent may not be entirely in point, it is clear that there are many lessons to be learned. In the main, those countries are miles ahead in terms of what is available to us. It is a great shame that the mother of Parliaments should not at least try to keep up with the times.

As a Scot who represents a rural area in south-east Scotland, I find it most frustrating that, for many weeks of the year, I am at home. I am not on holiday, but Parliament is in recess. Everyone understands that there is a substantial difference. I find it frustrating and difficult to continue the amount of work that I can achieve in Westminster when I am in my constituency for the long summer recess. If I had the advantage of the technological facilities that are now readily available, as a matter of course, even to medium-sized businesses in my constituency, I would be better able to continue the work that I would like to do. Increasingly, people seek access to me by fax machine or electronic mail, but I cannot respond to electronic mail. Although POLIS has limitations, access to it would allow us better to scrutinise the Executive which, after all, is what this place is supposed to be about.

I should not like anything that I have said to be taken as a suggestion that information technology can replace the invaluable personal service that we receive from the Library, the Computer Officer and others. However, much of the strain could be taken from them if hon. Members could use the machinery and the information technology themselves.

I am less worried about staff being trained. Staff have more time than we have and, in my experience, they are more concerned with text generation. I am interested in having more access to data. Therefore, although I accept that training is an essential part of the whole package, when I try to persuade my colleagues to move into information technology and supply themselves with IBM-compatible personal computers, those who have had no access to information technology are confronted by a fear barrier.

Once one has established the difference between a disk operating system and a piece of software, one is halfway there. It takes no more than two hours if one applies one's mind to it. Most of my colleagues are intelligent enough to master that. A wee bit of push and access to a couple of hours' training by experts, just to cross that initial fear barrier, would generate not simply the threefold increase noted in the report—dramatic though that is—but much more.

The hon. Member for Copeland is absolutely right to say that the standardisation and centralisation of the hardware would have massive advantages in terms of system commonality. There may be a price to pay—and I note that the report rightly says that that would not necessarily mean limiting ourselves to a single supplier, which would be wrong. Apricot and Compaq—both well established firms which produce machines in this country to a high standard—provide a range of machines.

However, if we could achieve some sort of standardisation and if serving Members knew that there were three or four industry-standard software packages, they could be given a great deal of help and become confident. If they found that there was a quirk in their software package, a quick telephone call would sort it out because they would be dealing with only two or three industry-standard software packages. So a great deal could be gained from standardising the hardware and some of the software packages.

I spend some time following developments in information technology as best as I can. I must confess to the hon. Member for Copeland that I was among those who did not return the last questionnaire because I was too busy trying to move the paper across my desk. To that extent, I stand condemned. However, the hon. Gentleman can add me to the list of people who have machines and try to stay at the forefront of the technology. I must admit that even I find it difficult to work out whether there is an advantage to acquiring DOS 5 as apposed to DOS 3.3, but the experts would no doubt argue for hours about the relative merits.

If I could telephone an expert and say, "I have the standard hardware package and a couple of standard word processing and software packages—is this sensible?", the answer would be yes or no. That would avoid my having to spend hours reading computer magazines on train and plane journeys between my constituency and Westminster, so there are massive advantages to be had.

The Committee's work is valuable, and I hope that we shall not waste any more time. There are many reasons for proceeding, as the Select Committee suggests, as soon as possible. I almost said that I have only an academic interest in who is in Government after the next general election, but that is not true. If I have any influence in the next Government, one of the first measures that we should introduce to this place is a longer-term, more visionary approach to providing facilities for hon. Members who are re-elected.

I hope that tonight's debate will make it easier for those of us who are re-elected and any new Members to start afresh and be confident that, in the four or five years of the next Parliament, facilities will be available to enable us to act in a modern way, represent our constituencies and scrutinise the Executive to the limits of our power. I hope that that will be provided centrally by the Services Select Committee with the information technology that best enables it to do so.

7.46 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I am sure that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) was right to suggest that he had only an academic interest in the outcome of the next general election. I am confident that my colleagues and I will still be on this side of the Chamber and that the hon. Gentleman will still be on the other side gazing across at us. That is the only note of dissent which I wish to enter with the hon. Gentleman.

I join the general welcome that has been given to the report on computer services for hon. Members. It is unusual for me to become enthusiastic about a Select Committee report, but perhaps I am jaundiced by my membership of the Welsh Select Committee. I must admit that I read the original report when it was published in 1984. I was then a new Member of Parliament, and I was struck by what the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) described as the faded gentility of the old-fashioned way in which we carry on our business.

I was excited by what I read in the original report, and thought of the possibilities that the new world of technology would open up. I hoped that it would equip us all and make us better legislators. Inevitably, press coverage of our consideration of the matter at that time was typified by a journalist who picked up a comment in the report about an hon. Member who said that his greatest need in new technology was to have a working telephone.

I was fascinated to hear that my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) is linked up to the POLIS system. In 1984, I thought that we could have such links and indulge in our justified professional curiosity in pursuing matters about which some hon. Members are reluctant to trouble the excellent staff of the Library. We do not want to bother them with every question that occurs to us and some ideas are inevitably left behind. To have an opportunity to fish through POLIS or, better still, an expanded database, to pursue all the questions that hon. Members with a lively genuine interest should want to pursue would be a real addition. I express no criticism of the service that we receive from the House of Commons Library, which provides us with excellent briefings, but, six years after the original report, nothing has happened.

I was struck by what the hon. Member for Copeland said about money, of necessity, being spent on providing computer services for staff and Officers of the House, but not for Members. I also noted the validity of his comment that better value for the taxpayer could be achieved by the use of common equipment from which hon. Members could select how to meet their needs.

Those of us whose secretaries and research assistants are not based here, in the Palace of Westminster, but who choose for good reasons to locate them in our constituencies provide a saving to the House. However, it is not a total saving to the taxpayer, because we make provision for our secretaries and research assistants in our constituencies from our office costs allowance.

I have long noted that there is a difference in cost share—those Members who, like me, choose to base their staff outside the Palace of Westminster end up being treated unfairly, because they are making office space available in the Palace by purchasing or renting it elsewhere. We also provide the heating, lighting and cleaning in those outside offices, so that it does not have to be provided for us within the Palace. If they were based here, our secretaries and research assistants would have the basic issue of equipment—a desk, a chair, a filing cabinet and carpet to walk on—for which the cost of provision and maintenance would be borne by the Palace. That issue should be examined, and consideration given to whether the office cost allowance should be extended for those Members who choose to provide those expenses outside the Palace.

Another issue closely linked to the provision of computer services is the opportunity that could be taken to provide the Government telephone network for all of us with staff in our constituencies. The most common telephone call I make is to my secretary in the constituency. I try to take advantage of the GTN by dialling 7, so that the cost falls on the Palace of Westminster switchboard as a local call. However, that does not work the other way, and my secretary's call to me is her most frequent telephone call. If all Members were provided with a GTN system in their constituencies, that would provide a saving. Such an operation must be introduced if the report is to be implemented and we are to derive the benefit of the equipment and technology, both here in the House and in our constituencies.

I listened with the greatest of interest to the news that the new offices will have annunciators the double as commercial televisions. The absence of the availability of commercial televisions to us when we are in our offices or in the Chamber inevitably leads us to be in an ivory tower —often on the wrong occasions. We need the source of information on which so many of our constituents depend.

I am sure that Members have often returned home to their constituencies at the weekend to be asked whether they saw a certain television programme such as "Question Time"—one of the most obvious examples. Obviously, many Members will not have seen it because they were in the Chamber or travelling home on Thursday evening. That gap in our knowledge probably leads people to suspect us of being in an ivory tower, because it is not one known to our constituents.

A couple of years ago, I visited the new Parliament in Canberra. In providing a brand new Parliament building which is designed to be good for at least another 200 years, the Australians have taken the opportunity to provide all the latest facilities. There is a television link to the Chamber in the office of every Member, and all the other channels are available. I should think that the Whips would very much want the same system to be introduced here. In Australia, they know in advance who is to speak next and have control of their own television camera so that they can pan round the Chamber to see if the next speaker is in his or her place. If panic sets in because he or she were not there, the problem can be easily overcome.

There are a number of such examples, of which that is but a small one, of how televising the Chamber and the other use of commercial channels would be helpful. The

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

only danger is what that system might do for attendance in the Chamber. If there were more opportunity to view it from outside, from offices, attendance in the Chamber might be as low as now or even lower, except at peak times when doughnutting might take place.

I am enthused about the way the report points the way forward, and I hope that we shall make progress, and not continue the lack of advance of the past six years. As other hon. Members have said, we should seize the opportunity to make progress—and the word should be "now", not "tomorrow".

7.56 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): When I first arrived in the House in 1983, I took as much advice as possible from colleagues already here on what it was essential to know in order to function in this place. I was told that, provided one found the loos, one would be able to function in all ways as a perfectly adequate Member of Parliament. Therefore, the range of knowledge that I did not immediately acquire was substantial, and among the information that I was not given early on was which computer one should buy to be an effective Member of Parliament.

I went to a person whom I thought could give advice, someone who had been a fellow councillor on Reading borough council. I said to him, "You know about computers, Geoff." He said, "Yes, I do. You need a Commodore." Therefore, I have been incompatible for the past eight years. As one who feels for those other Members who found themselves in a similar position, I felt it appropriate to say a word or two on this important subject.

I came into the House in the 1980s. With the exception of the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr. Cunningham) and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, I think that all those participating in the debate come from the more recent intakes to the House. We have been struck by what the report says about the services available to parliamentarians in other countries. I could not help noticing what the report said about Italy. It stated:

"The situation in the Chamber of Deputies is very similar" to that in the Senate.

"The central computer is an IBM 3090 Model 120S (shortly to be replaced by a Model 150J). Linked to this are two smaller systems, an IBM AS/400 Model B60 and an IBM 4381 Model 91 with altogether around 150 terminals, dedicated to supporting substantive (i.e. non-administrative) Parliamentary work. And the 12 Party Group offices are equipped with IBM PS/2 Model 60 Personal Computers and printers (not all linked to the central computer). There are also personal computers linked to the central system in each of the 13 Permanent Commission offices. Finally, the Chamber Research Department has a Phillips P7000 computer with 20 terminals. Deputies have access to all these facilities. As in the Senate, they make no contribution to their cost."

There are many other examples in the report that illustrate how far ahead other legislatures are. Why? It is fairly obvious that there is a generally low level of service to Members of this House across the board, and the computer service is no exception. Equally, if the number of hon. Members attending this debate is anything to go by, one must admit that there is a low level of interest in the subject. Why?

It would have been interesting if the Committee had looked at the relationship between the use of computer equipment and length of Members' service. I suspect that the more recently elected Members are those more likely to use computer equipment. That means that, over a period, as Members retire, so the percentage of Members who understand and want to use computers will progressively increase. It may not simply be a matter of educating existing Members, but may also involve the gradual turnover as new Members come into the House with each general election. That must mean that the level of understanding of information technology is rising all the time.

Having said that, I agree with the Committee that we should not go down the road of exercising compulsion as to the equipment that right hon. and hon. Members should use. Instead, we should provide in every office the plug that will allow the right equipment to be attached. That is not to say that every Member of Parliament should have a computer of one type or another. I support bulk purchase, but only on the basis that it offers the full commercial advantage that usually accrues from that practice—and not because we want to dictate to right hon. and hon. Members, who must continue to be their own men and women in deciding what is appropriate for them.

Recently, we have seen an enormous growth in the number of fax machines in the Palace. Perhaps we should switch soon to the bulk purchase of that equipment, in order to give Members of Parliament the advantage of so doing. I see no reason why we cannot do that immediately, because it would not require any increase in the availability of networking. Perhaps the Chairman of the Computer Sub-Committee, the hon. Member for Copeland, can comment. I hope that suggestion will find favour with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Right hon. and hon. Members also need a closed user group to operate a telemail system such as Telecom Gold. The antiquity of the methods that right hon. and hon. Members use to contact one another now is extraordinary. It is almost impossible to get a message to another right hon. or hon. Member, whether they are in the Palace or elsewhere, unless they happen to be answering their phones. It would be far preferable to leave a telemail message, which one could be certain of being received by either the Member of Parliament or his or her secretary.

All that would add to the potential use of a system. We must ensure that the broad band network under consideration will be of sufficient capacity to meet future needs, not only because, as years go by, more and more right hon. and hon. Members will want to use the system, but because the volume of the potential usuage will grow. There is a danger that sufficient capacity will not be provided in the broad band network to meet all the possible uses that will emerge. All offices in the Palace and in the outbuildings should be network-linked, and we should plan ahead for such an arrangement as it comes on-stream.

I do not believe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) suggested, that the availability of Chamber television coverage in the offices of right hon. and hon. Members would result in a lower attendance in the Chamber itself. I recall the argument that the televising of our proceedings would have a bad effect on the behaviour of right hon and hon. Members. That has been shown not to be true. Nor do I take the view that the provision of televisions in our offices would affect our

attendance in the Chamber. Instead, that facility would allow right hon. and hon. Members to keep in touch. I share the view expressed by others that right hon. and hon. Members are often the last to know what has happened in the Chamber or elsewhere in the world.

In recent months, I have questioned my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House about the provision of Sky satellite television to right hon. and hon. Members who ought to have access to the full range of stations. United Artists recently made a proposal concerning parliamentary proceedings. That is a good step forward, and I hope that the proposal can be extended. I also hope that we may enjoy news coverage not only by CNN, as we did during the Gulf crisis, but by Sky News, which is the British 24-hour news station from British Sky Broadcasting.

Right hon. and hon. Members could also have access to the video recordings, and with the right technology, would be able to call up on their own screens a news item or coverage of a particular incident in the House. One would not have to wait until tomorrow's newspapers to try to catch up, learning at second hand what had happened, according to the media. Instead, one could quickly reference an incident to which another right hon. or hon. Member or a constituent had drawn one's attention. Not to put too fine a point on it, such a facility would allow a Member of Parliament to check whether he was attacked during his absence from the Chamber in the way that a news report alleged earlier the same day or the day before.

Work also needs to be done on developing software that will enable right hon. and hon. Members to enjoy the full value of the hardware that might be the subject of bulk purchasing. Other hon. Members have referred to software that can serve as an electronic diary, handle a Member of Parliament's casework and so on. We probably all share the same needs in that regard. I see no reason why work on the provision of such software should not begin immediately and continue apace.

I believe that the cost of such an operation would be perfectly acceptable in political and economic terms. Mention has been made of cabling costs of £1·5 million. The cost to the public purse of the necessary hardware and software would be greater—but still a relatively small sum in comparison with the figures suggested by the hon. Member for Copeland. Members of Parliament would then be able to do a better job of representing their constituents and of controlling the Executive. I do not believe in the conspiracy theory that is sometimes advanced, to the effect that the Executive want to prevent Back Benchers from doing their proper job of monitoring the Government's work. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is anxious to reassure us that that has never been in his mind.

An opportunity to replace the ancient annunciator system would permit a move in the direction suggested by the Committee. I share the hope that the process of improvement can be speeded up. It is a long time since the issue was last raised in the House, and a long time since the report was published. In fact, it was 16 days less than one year ago.

When I was a newcomer to the House, I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Trade and Industry to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who was then Minister of State for Information Technology. He set in motion a revolution that introduced information technology to primary and secondary schools throughout the country. The first children to benefit from that development of the mid-1980s could be among those who become Members of Parliament in the general election after next. That generation will be amazed to discover that we have taken so long to reach technology conclusions that are so obvious, so right and so necessary.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will not suggest the establishment of half a dozen working parties to analyse the findings of the Sub-Committee. In my view, its work is excellent and stands on its own merits, and it ought to be acted upon without further delay.

8.8 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), who drew attention to the fact that we are having this debate nearly a year after the report was published. If nothing else, that shows the lack of importance that right hon. and hon. Members—given all the other things that are happening—attach to computerisation. That is a great pity. My first thought on reading the report was that it was very difficult to discuss networks before considering office accommodation. Some of us share offices that are some distance from the Palace. However, I realise that that is often an excuse for doing nothing.

Before coming to the House, I was in the computer industry for some years where I learned that one cannot wait for the next development but that decisions have to be taken and acted upon. Networks are invariably changed a few years after they are installed. I was at the sharp end of the computer industry, buying machines and trying to predict consumer demand, and I found that it was difficult to predict the way in which industry would move.

Desk-top publishing hit us almost before we realised it. Portability took rather longer, but it is now gathering momentum and might have changed earlier decisions on the report. The development of the fax machine in the past year has been quite extraordinary in terms of cost and extra facilities. That creates new demands and new ways of looking at problems associated with computing.

We should first create a network which should at least cover all hon. Members' offices and be flexible and simple. It should contain a database which can be expanded to incorporate extra facilities. It could contain our electoral rolls, because at present we spend a great deal of time trying to find out whether someone who has written to us is a constituent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon spoke about messages. Our message systems are efficient in their own way, but it is extraordinary that we cannot make use of the advances in computer technology to provide a more up-to-date message system. Extra information through television and radio channels needs to be provided in a much more user-friendly way. The network must be created as soon as possible.

I entirely agree with what has been said about training and advice. The problem encountered when introducing a new computer system to a company is that people are ignorant about its potential and about the sort of software, hardware, printers and peripherals that are needed to do the job properly. I suggest some sort of advice centre so that hon. Members can discuss their needs in a meaningful and knowledgeable way rather than in the somewhat amateurish and ignorant way that people tend to go about

[Mr. Keith Mans]

it at the moment, which is to ask a friend for advice. When one asks a friend about a good idea, one does not always get the correct answer.

Overall, the report is good, and I wish that we had taken action on it before now. Having installed the network and made use of the advice centre to gain more knowledge about what we want, a basic personal computer, obviously IBM compatible, and a printer should be made available to each Member, and that should not affect the secretarial allowance. Hon. Members can experiment with the system and decide what they need because London Members will probably require a different set-up from Members with constituencies such as that of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

Whether we like it or not, over the next 10 years every hon. Member will spend more money on electronic apparatus of one sort or another. In five or six years, we shall be using devices that we cannot even imagine now. I am sure that, five or six years ago, many hon. Members had never even seen a fax machine let alone used one.

Beyond the basic provision, there must be an element of choice. A classic example is the huge advance in the memory capacity of portable computers. The other day, I saw one that had 70 or 80 Mb of memory on a 586 chip. Such a technological increase is quite astounding. Bearing in mind the needs of hon. Members' in their constituency offices, their offices in this place and in their homes, portability will become more and more important. With the basic system in place, hon. Members may wish to use their secretarial allowance to buy other highly portable electronic devices.

I hope that the debate will help us to arrive at a firm conclusion along the lines that I have suggested. As I said, we should make progress with the network and training and with the provision of basic computer facilities. When hon. Members have gained some knowledge, they can make their requirements known and will be able to buy peripheral equipment to fit into the system.

8.16 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

(Mr. John MacGregor): The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) spoke about the time at which the debate started. I had no idea when it would start. Given that we were dealing with Lords amendments and in view of the amount of business on the Order Paper, we might well have embarked on the debate in the middle of the night. I am glad that we did not, because this is an important debate, which deserves an appropriate time.

In holding the debate today, I was implementing a promise given to the hon. Member for Copeland that I would use my best endeavours to debate the report before the summer recess. As the hon. Gentleman said, compared with debates on some other Select Committee reports we have made rapid progress on this one by having the debate within the year in which the report was published.

My hon. Friends the Members for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans) complained about delay and said that we should move more swiftly. In endeavouring to hold the debate before the recess, I had it in mind that we would be able to make swift progress on the report's recommendations. I am delighted to see that there has been general agreement on all matters except the result of the next general election. However, that is not material to the debate. Hon. Members feel that these are important matters and that it is imperative to get on with them.

The House owes a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Copeland and his Sub-Committee for their work in producing the report, in assessing the current use by hon. Members of computers and similar equipment, for making what the hon. Gentleman described as modest proposals for co-ordination in the use of such equipment, and for making progress in the House. The Sub-Committee has pointed the way in practical terms to the establishment of an information technology network which will enable hon. Members to communicate efficiently with colleagues and constituency offices. Other ways in which it will assist hon. Members have been mentioned in the debate. It will also enable hon. Members to take advantage of the powerful information services that are becoming available in the public and private sectors.

The hon. Member for Copeland referred to last year's survey of Members' computer equipment. That revealed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre pointed out, that many colleagues have used the opportunity of the improvement of the office costs allowance to increase the use of computers, word processors, fax machines and so on which are now penetrating the work of Members' offices. As the hon. Member for Copeland said, we are now talking about issues facing the average Member with an average office. We are no longer dealing with the frontiers of new technology but with the ordinary reality of the day-to-day work of most offices, most other business sectors and, as the hon. Gentleman said, education.

I have already said that most hon. Members who have spoken in the debate referred to the desirability of the House reaching decisions that would lead to early action to implement the recommendations of the Computer Sub-Committee. I fully support the Sub-Committee's proposals. I share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Copeland for moving more quickly than his report advocates, although he made clear the reason for going at the pace he suggested—the need to obtain unanimous support. Like the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), I well understand that.

We are at a most important new stage in the evolution of the services provided for the House as a whole. The problems raised by the previous report of the Services Committee, to which reference has been made, were frequently quoted during the Ibbs inquiry to illustrate the need for the establishment of a more coherent structure for decisions concerning new services for the House. We already have in place a new director of finance and administration to implement part of the Ibbs report. If the House agrees, I hope that in the autumn we shall have the new Select Committees, including the Finance and Services Committee. That will enable sensible and coherent decisions to be made and full account to be taken of their costs.

Moreover, decisions will be made more quickly than has been the case in the past. My preference is for the more expensive decisions—I stress the more expensive decisions —that face us on the issue to be delayed until the new Ibbs arrangements can be in place and decisions taken through them. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who I know has had to leave the debate, that that is no reason for delay. He called for action now.

The Ibbs system will enable us to take those decisions more quickly and efficiently. I hope that the bulk of the decisions can be taken in that way. However, I believe that we can make useful progress towards implementing the report before we reach that point in the autumn. I shall return to this matter at the end of my speech.

As several hon. Members have made clear, there is now wide acceptance in the House of computers, word processors and so on. They are becoming increasingly normal in the day-to-day traffic between Members, Government Departments and officials of the House. The Computer Sub-Committee has also demonstrated that many Back Benchers—I suspect probably the majority by now—have made extensive use of their office costs allowance to purchase such equipment. Many would also like access to information services, such as the Library's POLIS service, and to some commercial information services. The steady improvement in the office costs allowance that has taken place during the lifetime of this Government has helped Members to make use of the new technologies. What we are talking about now is how to proceed further.

If I may follow up what the hon. Member for Copeland said in relation to the previous Services Committee report and the reaction to it, the feeling was that one had to bear in mind the fact that there are still some hon. Members who do not want the new technologies to be imposed upon them. My feeling, and that of most hon. Members who have spoken, is that the number of such Members of Parliament will decline substantially. However, their attitude has to be taken into account.

On the whole, I think that the Computer Sub-Committee has got the balance about right. It was right to say that the building will need to be re-cabled soon for the sake of the annunciator system. I share the Sub-Committee's view that it would be wrong to do so without making provision for the transmission of computerised information services. I am sure, too, that the Computer Sub-Committee was right to emphasise the potential advantages—a point made by the hon. Member for Copeland—of scale in the bulk purchase and maintenance of new office machinery through some sort of central agency. Equally, I am certain that the Sub-Committee was right not to suggest that we are ready to move over to a system in which office equipment is provided from central funds, with individual colleagues no longer having the choice about what equipment to purchase, let alone whether they want such equipment at all. My hon. Friends the Members for Swindon and for Wyre laid emphasis on the need for individual choice.

The overall aim of the Services Committee is set out in paragraph 28(c) of its report. I quote it because, although I was not a member of the Committee, its policy has my unqualified support. The Services Committee says that the objective is that

> "the House should now adopt as long-term policy the aim of providing the best available information technology services for Members from central funds, while at the same time preserving a reasonable degree of individual discretion in the choice of systems for use by Members and their staffs."

That general aim was endorsed by all hon. Members who spoke in the debate. It represents an important declaration of intent by the House to accept responsibility for ensuring the best possible computer services for Members, in much the same way as we have now accepted responsibility for providing a minimum standard of basic office accommodation for all Members and their staff.

As has been pointed out, we are not talking just about equipment for individual Members. We are talking about POLIS and various other services that can be plugged in. When I re-read the Computer Sub-Committee's report, I was struck by the wealth of communication and information services that would become available through the establishment of a network. The memorandum from the Library—reproduced on pages 40 to 46 of the report—mentions the vast range of services to which I have just referred. I agree with all those who have said that this will improve the way in which we do our jobs and how we communicate with our constituents.

The Sub-Committee's report also argues in favour of a new cable network for the very straightforward and practical reason that it would simultaneously provide the framework for information technology services and enable the annunciator system to be replaced and all Members to receive the whole range of public service television broadcasts in their offices. I am wholly in favour of that development, particularly since some Members—notably those who will have offfices in the phase 1 building from October—either have or will have access to such services.

Paragraph 47 of the Sub-Committee's report suggests that the main costs of the installation of a new broad-band cable should fall on the Vote of the House of Commons Commission rather than on the parliamentary works budget. The Sub-Committee may be right about that. Indeed, I suspect that it will be right, although discussions need to be held between the parties concerned. Until now, these costs have been seen as falling on the parliamentary works budget. It is likely that that budget will become part of the responsibility of the Commission in the near future. We shall still have to justify the expenditure and ensure that a proper attribution of costs is made, but I believe that that is the way that this matter will proceed.

That brings me to the point about which I was asked by the hon. Member for Copeland—the main proposals for immediate action, contained in paragraphs 44 and 57 of the report. They are for discussions to identify the kind of cable needed for a network and for a working party to recommend a shortlist of approved equipment. I believe that these matters could now be put in hand very swiftly. I take the general endorsement of the report by hon. Members as a clear indication that those hon. Members who have an interest in these matters approve of the report and want us to get on with it.

In the light of the debate, therefore, I propose to ask the House of Commons Commission to authorise the limited amount of expenditure that is needed to allow the initial studies proposed by the Sub-Committee to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. Once the various working parties have reported to the Computer Sub-Committee—or to its post-Ibbs successor—the way should be open for a firm recommendation to be made to the Commission, with the advice of the Finance and Services Committee, to allow planning for a new cable network to be put in hand. I am advised that these initial studies should be speedy affairs. Therefore, I hope and expect that serious plans for the cable network should be put in hand in the autumn.

[Mr. John MacGregor]

I hope that I have given the hon. Member for Copeland the response that he sought. Again, may I say how grateful the House is to him for the work that he has done. On that basis, knowing that there is a different type of Adjournment debate to follow, I beg to——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Before the Leader of the House does that, I see that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) wishes to reply.

8.29 pm

Dr. Cunningham: The speech by the Leader of the House was excellent news for hon. Members, and I warmly welcome his positive response to the debate. In 21 years in the House, I cannot remember a single occasion on which everyone who followed me in the debate agreed with me —it is worth putting that, if nothing else, on record this evening. I suppose that I should enjoy it while it lasts, because I do not expect it to become permanent.

The speeches of the hon. Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and of the Leader of the House were well worth listening to. I am grateful for their kind comments about the report which reflect not only on me as Chairman of the Sub-Committee but on all members of the Sub-Committee, whom I thank for their work. It is appropriate also to place on record our thanks to the Clerk and to the advisers to the Committee. Clearly a report that can command such unanimous support as this one has considerable merit, if not a unique character.

I am grateful to the Leader of the House for obviating what may have been a problem, in that this has been a debate on the Adjournment and not a debate on a motion to take note of the Committee's report. I look forward to working with the right hon. Gentleman on the Commission and elsewhere in order to make the urgent progress which hon. Members so clearly desire.

Mr. MacGregor: On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Motion No. 6, Business of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: Not moved.

8.30 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Motion No. 6 was not moved. Will the Leader of the House explain why? The motion was on the Order Paper and there was no announcement, until recently, that it would be withdrawn. Did that happen because there would have been time to debate that normally procedural motion? It is almost certainly the truth that it could have been objected to after 10 o'clock, so the Government would not normally have withdrawn it.

As the main subject of the procedural motion, to limit the debate to an hour and a half, is to take place tomorrow night——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is now seeking to debate the motion. The motion was not moved, so I am obliged to proceed to the next business. If the hon. Member wishes to raise a point of order, I will hear it.

Mr. Cryer: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will the motion be on tomorrow's Order Paper? The business for this week has been settled and announced by the Leader of the House. If the motion is on tomorrow's Order Paper, will time be allocated for debate in the usual way before we move on to the business that is to be regulated by the motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not a matter for the Chair.

PETITION

Royal Welch Fusiliers

8.32 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I beg to ask leave to present a petition from the length and breadth of Wales by the friends of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The petition was instigated at short notice, but it encountered huge public support. The Royal Welch Fusiliers have won magnificent battle honours and I have found remarkable support for them throughout Wales, which perhaps demonstrates the respect and honour felt for them.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the House of Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled,

The humble Petition of friends of the Royal Welch Fusiliers showeth that the Royal Welch Fusiliers, part of the Prince of Wales's Division, is faced with possible amalgamation with an English regiment—a move which effectively amounts to the disbandment of the regiment and the ending of 300 years of tradition.

Under the present plans, reduction in the strength of the Prince of Wales's Division and the virtual disappearance of the Royal Welch Fusiliers would leave Wales with 25 per cent. less than its fair share of the infantry. Disbandment will have disastrous economic consequences for Wales, with the eventual loss of up to 100,000 jobs and obvious implications for the whole Welsh economy.

Wherefore your Petitioner prays that your Honourable House will support us by seeking assurances from the Government that the Royal Welch Fusiliers is not disbanded and that Wales is not treated less fairly than Scotland is. And your Petitioner as in duty bound will ever pray.

The petition was signed by Brigadier Anthony C. Vivian, CBE, former colonel of the regiment, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, regimental headquarters, Hightown barracks, Wrexham, Clwyd.

To lie upon the Table.

Bypasses

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

8.35 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I am glad to be able to comment on the Government's bypass programme, which affects almost every constituency, including my own and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who unfortunately cannot be here.

I do not wish to attack the Government's record, since there is no reason to do so. Having checked, I find that their record is good. For instance, transport supplementary grant for 1991-92 is £318 million, a 17 per cent. increase on the previous year. Today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced a further 15 bypasses at a cost of £85 million. Therefore, I start from the premise that the Government understand why the construction of as many bypasses as possible is beneficial. Clearly, it reduces accidents. I note from an unpublished study by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory that rural bypasses result in up to a 32 per cent. reduction in accidents. They are therefore clearly desirable.

My village of Tickton in east Yorkshire is lucky enough to have a bypass, which brings me to another advantage of bypasses. That is simply that they separate me and my neighbours from all the heavy traffic which previously went through the centre of my village. Last, but by no means least, there is a gain to the environment. Less congestion means lower carbon dioxide emissions. I am predisposed to the view that the Government understand all that. Organisations such as the British Road Federation have told me that the Government should accelerate the programme. No hon. Member would disagree.

I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington has now been able to come to the House motivated no doubt by the importance of the subject. My constituency has moreover benefited from the Government's programme. Recently, the Humber bridge northern approach road was completed. It is not exactly a bypass, but it acts as one and alleviates traffic problems in all the villages in the Haltemprice area. Skidby is not in my constituency, but the recent bypass benefits my constituents, as does the southern bypass for Beverley.

As my hon. Friend the Minister understands, demand for bypasses is never ending. That is why Humberside county council proposes three major schemes for Government support in its transport policies programme for 1991-92. It proposed the Peakes Parkway scheme in Grimsby, the Leven-Brandesburton bypass, which is partly in my constituency and partly in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), and the Great Union street improvement scheme in Hull. They are all very worthy schemes, and I am sure that—in the fulness of time—they will receive the approval that is being sought from the Government.

However, I shall deal specifically with the Leven-Brandesburton bypass because it illustrates well why the Government have a road improvement programme at all. I quote from the consultative document of Humberside county council, which states exactly how the council feels about the need for a bypass in the area. It states:

[Mr. James Cran]

"The A165 forms part of the primary route network within the County and it carries exceptional peak traffic in the holiday season."

A considerable amount of heavy vehicular traffic also goes through Leven and Brandesburton because the manufacture of mobile buildings for industrial use is carried out in that part of east Yorkshire. The caravans are wide, and all or nearly all of them have to be transported through those two villages.

Humberside county council's consultative document continues:

"The present route . . . is characterised by sharp bends, narrow carriageways, a large number of accesses, poor visibility and little safe overtaking opportunity. The road passes through Leven where there are substandard width footways for pedestrian access . . . there are parts of the road where forward visibility is very restricted and . . . crossing the road can be hazardous."

It is perfectly clear that Humberside county council is wholly convinced of the need for the bypass as it could not have used stronger language in its advocacy of this project. Indeed, the council's 1991-92 transport policy programme stated:

"The A165 has a high accident record and by bypassing the villages the scheme should show major accident savings."

That is very strong language.

It would be usual for an hon. Member now to plead with the Minister for funding for that project. Anyone listening to the debate might think that the Government had not already given approval or finance, but that is not so. The Minister for Roads and Traffic has been very patient—he met me, County Councillor Arthur Pollard and Borough Councillor Mrs. Pat Ablett and gave us a considerable amount of his time. He examined many photographs which show how difficult—almost impossible—it is for traffic to get through the two villages and on the basis of that and, I am sure, of independent assessment, he concluded that the bypass should be approved and given finance—and that is precisely what the Government did on 17 December last year.

It is entirely understandable that the inhabitants of both villages were delighted because it is no secret that they have been waiting for a bypass for many years. Industry, in the form of Lada cars, for instance, which take transporters through the village, and Transline, which transports the mobile buildings through them, were also utterly delighted because they do not want to pollute the villages or cause the difficulties that have undoubtedly existed until now.

That begs the question, why raise the issue at all? Notwithstanding the fact that the Government have given approval and finance for, I think, half the project, the county council—in this case, Humberside—has decided to cancel the bypass. I should perhaps use the word "cancel" carefully, because, after considerable public pressure, there are signs that the council might be rethinking its position on the subject.

The Minister and other hon. Members might be interested to know that what particularly irritated people was the manner in which the decision was taken which left much to be desired. The decision was not taken formally in the transportation committee or ratified by the full council although that may eventually occur. It was merely announced in a fairly brutal fashion by the chairman of the transportation committee and by the leader of the council. That is despite the fact that those gentlemen and the council proposed the bypass in the first place and, indeed, highlighted the fact that they were to proceed with it in the community charge bills that we all subsequently received.

Therefore, I am not here to ask the Minister to defend that action because it is not his responsibility——

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Was political pique not the original reason for cancelling the bypass because the socialist leader of the county council objected to a very good speech made by my hon. Friend criticising the profligate spending of the council? I wonder if my hon. Friend agrees that it is no wonder that people in our part of the country have revolted against Humberside and demanded its abolition? We are very pleased about the result of the Boundary Commission report, which was published last week.

Mr. Cran: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. With the unerring timing that he shows in the House, he has anticipated my remarks. We all find it difficult to understand why the county council took such a decision, because usually county councils complain that the Government have not given them the money to proceed with a proposal. That is not the case in this instance because the Government have done so.

To satisfy my hon. Friend, I may merely quote from the *Hull Daily Mail* of 21 June this year. That paper and, indeed, all the newspapers in that region of East Yorkshire have done a superb job in articulating the outrage felt by many people about an arbitrary and, as my hon. Friend said, clearly political decision. What did the leader of the county council say? One assumes that these are his words as I am quoting from a letter to the editor. He said:

"the Hull Daily Mail has come out in total support of an early start on the Leven bypass which will cost almost £10 million . . . Critics who suggest that the county council is being vindictive"—

it is, of course, quite clear that it is—

"over the Leven bypass fail to appreciate the difficulties we face . . . Our problem could be eased substantially with the support of Mr Cran. If he were to join us in pressing the Government to recognise the difficulties we face—and reflect them in our SSA this December",

the Leven bypass could go ahead. As that comes from the horse's mouth, so to speak, I would appreciate it if the Minister would address that particular point.

It is clear to all of us who have examined the decision that it was a political one. I suspect that no one will be surprised at the great disappointment in the villages of Leven and Brandesburton, where people are astonished and indeed feel that they have been treated unjustly. They are trying to rectify the position by speaking to the council and trying to get the council to change its mind. Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington nor I have sought to dissuade them from that course. If they succeed, we shall all be delighted, but I suspect that that will not occur.

Who therefore protects the villagers of Leven and Brandesburton? It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friends and to Opposition Members that those people look to the Government, as I fear that everyone does, and to the House to make a judgment about the natural justice—or in this case injustice—of what has happened. They look to the Minister to provide some help, although that may prove difficult as the Minister has already promised half the cost of the scheme. They also look to the Minister to answer a number of questions, if he can.

My constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington want to know about the Government's attitude to the high-handed, cavalier and undoubtedly political decision. My constituents also want to know whether, in the Government's view, the county council's decision is legally based. Moneys have been committed in the current budget and, I am led to believe, those moneys are being spent. The whole exercise was advertised through the community charge bills to the whole community in the Humberside county council area and everyone there expects the bypass to go ahead.

My constituents look to the Minister to inquire into the arbitrary and highly irregular decision by the county council. Will my hon. Friend tell us how long the grant approval that he has given will last? Not unnaturally, my constituents are trying to convince the county council to change the decision. They would be wasting their time if the grant approval did not last for any length of time.

There should be no politics on this issue. The county council has conceded that it is a matter of safety. Anyone who considers the question of bypasses knows perfectly well that they are highly desirable. The Government are doing their best to provide bypasses at the speed at which they should, and I am satisfied that they are doing that. Against that background, can my hon. Friend the Minister suggest to my constituents what they can do to get a bypass in Leven and Brandesburton?

8.52 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I know better than to try to intrude in the affairs of Humberside. However, I thank the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), whose good fortune it is that this debate on an important subject of principle has come on rather earlier than he could have expected, for giving me a minute or two. He may have problems with the Humber bridge, but I have problems as the Member of Parliament representing the south side of the eldest of the three sisters of the Forth bridge. I wish to engage the Minister's attention on that subject. I have talked to the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who has direct responsibility for the matter at the Scottish Office. I assuage him with the observation that anything that I propose will be greatly to the personal convenience of the Secretary of State for Transport, who is my Parliamentary neighbour and who would benefit greatly from my proposals.

My first concern is the Barnton roundabout. As is the case with roundabouts in a number of cities, it gets choked, and to such an extent that on summer mornings, six days a week, the traffic tails back as far as the Forth bridge. It is one of Europe's biggest choke points. With all the talk about building a second Forth bridge, I ask those with access to Treasury strings whether it would not be better to help Lothian regional council at least to try at Barnton the kind of flyover which, I am told by James Provan, the recent Conservative Member of the European Parliament for North-East Scotland, has been tried with great success in Antwerp. Various European cities have met the problem and in a relatively short time have erected a series of flyovers which at least alleviate the problem even if they do not completely solve it.

If the alternative is a second bridge across the Forth, I, as a person with considerable local knowledge, warn that it would be very much more difficult to build the third Forth bridge than it was to build the second—if the rail bridge is the first—because the geology of crossing the Forth is, I am told, far more difficult at any possible site. The best site was taken by the bridge built in the 1960s.

The hon. Member for Beverley referred to carbon dioxide emissions. The gross bottleneck causes problems such as carbon dioxide, a waste of petrol, a waste of busy people's time, frayed nerves and hassle. It all mounts up to an environmental horror. None the less, one must ask to what extent part of the trouble is caused by the existence of tolls, which slow down the flow of traffic. I have never understood what the difference is between exacting money from the motoring public for going over water and not exacting money from them when they go over lengths of motorway which are almost as expensive and difficult to construct. I cannot see that there is a qualitative difference in what we are asking people to do.

Ten years ago—I do not see that it is different now—it was twelve and a half times more expensive to extract money in the form of tolls than from the collection of the standard rate of income tax. It is an extraordinarily inefficient way in which to raise revenue. The problem has become acute because tolls add to delays. I put a marker in the Minister's mind. Will the Department of Transport, along with the Scottish Office, consider the whole question of the Forth bridge? Will they talk properly to Lothian region to see whether the problem can be solved?

The second area that desperately needs a bypass is Newbridge. When I mentioned to the hon. Member for Eastwood what I was going to say tonight, he volunteered the information that it often took him rather longer to go from Newbridge, which is on the city outskirts, into the centre of Edinburgh than it did to go from his own city of Glasgow—indeed, from the other side of it because England is on the far side of Glasgow from Edinburgh—to the Edinburgh city boundary. That is how bad things have become. There should be discussions between Lothian region, the Scottish Office and the Department of Transport about what could be done in terms of a flyover.

I suppose that we must all register our personal convenience and not our personal interests. However, as I live in my constituency, I must travel here every Monday on the 7 am shuttle or the 7.10 am British Midland flight, or leave my journey until much later in the morning. It is not possible to travel from the west of the city without reckoning on a 30-minute or 45-minute delay, to catch the 8 am, 9 am or 10 am flight to London. The personal convenience of hon. Members or others is not the dominant factor. I just refer to that as an example of how acute the position has become in relation to Newbridge.

It would be remiss of me not to refer to the dreadful accident on the A1 on the other side of the city that was reported on our television screens. Children were killed in that accident at 2.30 am as they travelled down from Alness. The accident occurred in one of those fogs that occur in the area. That stretch of road is very dangerous.

After every dreadful accident, I suppose people automatically say that something must be done about a road, but the issue is overtaken by other things and people forget about it. People also say that it is not the road that is at fault, but the driver. However, that stretch of road is particularly dangerous. I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who appeared on television and said that he and the local authorities asked for something to be done about that road. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Beverley for allowing me to participate in the debate.

8.59 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on his far-sightedness in choosing a subject that is important for Opposition and Conservative Members. I congratulate my hon. Friend on what he told the House about the problems concerning his constituency.

A short while ago, I was penning a letter to Mr. Speaker in the hope that I might be selected for an Adjournment debate on bypasses. I thought that I would take this opportunity to try to kill two birds very briefly with one stone and refer to the problems in my constituency which have been building up for some time.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic for being kind enough to send me not one, but two letters today. The first refers to road safety on the A47 at Skeffington. Skeffington has been the subject of a bypass programme and I am glad to learn today that the road improvement on the busy A47 east from the city of Leicester is to be transferred from the regional to the national roads programme. I was also delighted to learn that the scheme forms part of an £85 million national package of bypasses for local schemes that have just been announced.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic was kind enough to send me a copy of the press release and a note about the fact that Market Harborough in my constituency is one of the towns selected for the bypass demonstration project.

Like everyone else, I have every confidence in the generosity, kindness and good judgment of my hon. Friend the Minister. I am sure that the selection of Market Harborough's bypass, which is now being built—the A6 bypass north and south—is something for which we will all be grateful. However, it is not too clear what the selection involves.

In his letter today, my hon. Friend the Minister says that Market Harborough has been nominated for the much sought after demonstration project by the Market Harborough local authority. However, some of the enclosures to which he refers are difficult for the layman to understand. The press release refers to a traffic calming programme. What is that? I am extremely foolish not to know what such a programme involves, but that is part of the official announcement that, I am delighted to say, has been made today. I should be more than grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could explain briefly what such a programme involves.

I was going to write to Mr. Speaker to seek an Adjournment debate about a bypass for a project that has plagued my constituency for 30 years. The issue is not unrelated to the M1-A1 link road, of which most hon. Members will be aware. Of course, all local authorities in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire are full supporters of the M1-A1 link road, which is nearing completion. However, so great is the east-west traffic on the A427, which presently runs parallel to the link road, and so much is congestion increasing because the gap in the M1-A1 link road has not yet been filled, that some villages on the A427 in Leicestershire, nearly all of which are in Harborough constituency, are becoming very choked and in a dangerous state. For instance, in the village of Theddingworth, from which a deputation came to see me the other day at my constituency interview session, there have been no fewer than 16 accidents on the A427 in the past half year.

My hon. Friend the Minister cannot know everything —although he knows an awful lot—but his officials will tell him that this matter has nothing to do with him; it is not a Department road, it is a county council road. The purpose of my Adjournment debate would have been to point out that I cannot remain silent any longer without a request for the taking over of many of the important trunk roads which are not adopted by the Department. I cannot remain silent any longer in face of the transparent need for that taking over to take place at an early date. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said that he supported the abolition of the north Humberside authority because of culpable misconduct.

I, too, hope that the review that is now taking place will lead to a careful reconsideration of the position of the Leicestershire county council, certainly in respect of transportation, which needs to be removed from it altogether. I can see no reason at all why the role of the effective and efficient district and borough councils in Leicestershire cannot be expanded and Leicestershire county council completely abolished.

I do not say that lightly. The reason why I say it is that, 22 years ago, Leicestershire county council promised a by-pass of Theddingworth. The route was approved by the county council, and £1 million or so was allotted. Work was due to commence, and then, lo and behold, the then Minister for Transport said, "We are going to build a wonderful M1-A1 link road in Northamptonshire, just south of the A427." As soon as that announcement was made, all work on the Theddingworth bypass ceased and traffic was allowed to go through it. That was 22 years ago.

It has been pointed out to Leicestershire county council that there is a danger to life and limb on the A427. The situation is so intolerable that it should not be allowed to continue. It has now come up with another date, 1991, to build the Theddingworth bypass, but the latest announcement is that it cannot be at all sure of that date.

Quite frankly, I am fed up with the county council on this matter. It has behaved disgracefully. If ever there was a case for a unitary authority in respect of road traffic management matters and the recommendation of a bypass programme, it is the craven role of Leicestershire county council over Theddingworth and its population for the past 25 years. I am delighted that the Minister is kind enough to be present, and I hope that he will act on a matter of concern for all my constituents.

9.9 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I, too, should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on raising an issue that is important to many of us. I feel honoured to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). When I first became a Member of the House—a long time ago—as one of 158 new Members, my hon. Friend was exceptionally kind not only to me but to my secretary, who was also new to the House, and neither she nor I have ever forgotten it. My hon. Friend is very much loved by both of us and by many other colleagues. I am delighted to see him in his place.

Unlike many other parts of the country, my constituency of Derbyshire, South is now very busy, partly

because we have the largest building site in Europe—the Toyota factory, which is now being built right opposite my house. I am pleased to see it—there is no NIMBY in my area. The result is that unemployment in the area is below 5 per cent. and two-car households are now common in South Derbyshire. Indeed, if recent canvassing is anything to go by, families with three, four or more cars are increasingly common in south Derbyshire.

We are a rural area, with more than 50 villages, and our traffic problems have rapidly become acute. The problem is driving many of my constituents absolutely scatty. Most of the roads in the area are country lanes and we would be in some difficulties even without the growth in traffic that the increased economic activity has generated. The problem in many villages would be much worse if it were not for the weight restrictions on some of their roads. However, they mean that the traffic must go somewhere else—it cannot just disappear—and it tends to go through the slightly larger villages, where traffic restrictions are not in place.

The fact that the problem is substantially a local one —we do not blame anybody else for it—is shown by the recent speeding problem in the village of Repton. The Repton people complained bitterly to the police about the speeding and the police naturally responded by setting up a speed trap for a couple of days. Nearly 400 people were found to be exceeding the 30-mile an hour speed limit as they drove through the village; 90-odd of them received a ticket and the rest were cautioned. About 75 per cent. of those found to be speeding turned out to live in the village or its immediate vicinity. As one can imagine, that produced some rather red faces, but it proved that traffic in the area is considerable and that the roads are not coping with it.

A couple of years ago, I took a delegation to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) at the Department of Transport. We were most grateful to the Department and to my hon. Friend for the interest, concern and consideration that was shown to south Derbyshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said, in a slightly puzzled way, that we were the first delegation that he had seen for some time to ask for road building rather than insisting that a road should be built somewhere else. We actually wanted a road built in South Derbyshire—and the quicker the better.

The result has been gratifying. One bypass is already under construction—for the substantial village of Etwall —and there are more to come. We are expecting bypasses for the villages of Hatton, Hilton and Foston. A public inquiry was held last autumn and a decision is expected this autumn. That bypass is part of a road connection system that is due to run from Stoke to Derby and then across to the M1—the M6 to M1 link, which will bring considerable relief to the M6 north of Birmingham and also provide a link to the Toyota factory.

The line for that development was dealt with at the same public inquiry last year that considered the bypasses for Hatton, Hilton and Foston. The total cost of the M6-M1 link will be £150 million or more. The link will entail constructing a new bridge across the River Trent, which will be a substantial undertaking. We do not underestimate the amount of effort, time, skill and construction and planning expertise that will be involved. I should like to put our gratitude for that on the record.

None of this was possible under the previous Administration. The developments were talked about for the first time more than 20 years ago. In 1976, the line of the new route was drawn, but it was one of the casualties of the previous Government's efforts at spending money that they did not have. As a result, in 1976, that line was left on the piece of paper and no further progress was made. On the other hand, we are now very pleased with the progress that has been made.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister a number of questions. I recognise that he might not be able to respond to them tonight, but I hope that he will be kind enough to write to me about them. First, as I hope that I have hinted in my brief contribution, the new road is a matter of considerable urgency to my constituents. It is becoming increasingly difficult to explain to constituents why the road does not yet exist, why the traffic is still going through the villages and why, in villages such as Willington, there is a snarl-up every morning and every night extending right through into the dual carriageways.

We now have much more dangerous and lethal roads than we used to have. A series of my young constituents have been killed on roads in places where there should be bypasses. I find it as distressing as the local police and funeral directors do when we are obliged to try to explain to the families why there are no new roads yet, and why the bypasses have not been built.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether we can speed up the decision-making as soon as possible and ensure that the programme for the link road between Stoke and Derby and the M1 does not slip in any way. It is becoming increasingly important that we hold to all the timetables.

On present estimates, the Toyota factory will produce 100,000 cars a year, but that figure is expected to increase to 200,000 by 1995-96. All the industry estimates show that by the end of the century the factory will produce 400,000 cars a year. Although I hope that many of those cars will be sent by rail, if we can get British Rail to co-operate —that is another fairly dodgy question—those estimates nevertheless imply an enormous amount of supplies coming in, and many staff coming in and out. On current estimates, the number of staff movements in and out of the factory by 1995-96 is likely to be about 6,000 a day. If the estimates are accurate—and I think that they are—we have to take on board the fact that the Toyota factory will generate an enormous amount of traffic on the roads.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that the present programme will not slip, and that the Department of Transport will accord the matter the same urgency as we do.

The second problem about which I want to ask my hon. Friend concerns connections to the new road. When new roads are built, especially the good quality dual carriageways for which we hope, land on either side of them becomes valuable. There are now a number of proposals on the books for developing sites that are otherwise of no special value. For example, there is an old airfield at Church Broughton, a Ministry of Defence depot at Hilton and one or two other such sites, which have suddenly become valuable and useful. They are close to the Toyota site; they would be connected directly by road and in one or two cases they might be connected by rail, too.

The difficulty is that the Department of Transport insists on two conditions. First, it insists that, if there is to be a connection to the new road, the whole works, the complete operation, must be there right from the start even

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

though it may be several years before the site will come into use. Department officials appear to be insisting that on one site the whole connection for a development covering 200-odd acres must be in place before the first acre is let. I understand their arguments, but the trouble is that that course of action is extremely expensive.

The second problem that the officials present is that they insist that the developer pays the lot. With a £4 million or £5 million connection for a site whose total infrastructure costs may be of the same order, that can make the whole development financially unviable. I should like to see more realistic attitudes, so that connections for sites could be developed partially on a stepped, staged basis. That would be helpful. The present all-or-nothing arrangements are unrealistic and unfair.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister could enlighten me on the other matter that concerns me, as no hon. Members from any of the other parties are here. I am concerned about the comments on the road-building programme made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). I have written to the hon. Gentleman about what he said but have had no reply. I understand that, speaking at a construction industry conference in Edinburgh in April, in a speech that was well reported in the construction industry press, the hon. Gentleman said that if the Opposition were elected, the first thing that they would do would be to slap a moratorium on all road building.

I can understand that one might want to review the road-building programme, but I am most alarmed at any proposal to introduce a moratorium. In my letter I asked the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East whether his moratorium would apply to my road in South Derbyshire, but I have had no reply. My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) may be worried about the attitude of our hon. Friend the Minister to his new road, but he would have a heck of a lot more to worry about if the Opposition were in charge.

Mr. Cran: I must clarify the point. The Government have already given financial approval for the Leven-Brandsburton bypass. The problem is not the Government but my county council, Humberside.

Mrs. Currie: I heard most of what my hon. Friend said. I put it to him again that financial approval is one thing but that, until the pennies are actually spent and the work done, the road is not built. If the Opposition got in, and if a moratorium were called immediately, the odds are that the bypass would go the same way as my road went in 1976: it would not get built. I hope that my hon. Friend will draw the problem to the attention of his constituents, especially those who think it would not matter much if they voted Labour next time. It would matter a great deal. That is a matter of considerable concern. Perhaps the Minister will check out the speech made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East in April, which was well reported in the construction press, and say whether there is anything that we can do about it.

Sir John Farr: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind remarks, and I was interested to hear what she said about the Opposition. Can she tell us which Opposition party she had in mind? Is she aware of the Liberal Democrats' views—or do they not have any views about road building?

Mrs. Currie: That is an interesting proposition. I share my hon. Friend's consternation at the apparent position of the Labour party. The remarks were certainly made in public, and the speech was handed out to the press. I am also somewhat alarmed because, for the first time in recent history, a Labour spokesman, talking about what the Labour party might do if it won power, was prepared to say that it would stop spending money. Most of the time, Labour spokesmen say that they will increase spending, and so far, the total bill amounts to about £40 billion. As for the Liberal Democrats, they will as usual try to determine on which side of the fence the grass is greener and jump over it at that point. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will check out the Liberal Democrats' policies and let the rest of us know.

We in south Derbyshire are very pleased at developments over the bypasses, which are urgently needed. I live in a very pretty, rural area. It is no longer quite as tranquil as it used to be. It is a busy area. My constituents are working. They drive to work, and in pursuit of their leisure activities, with their families. I am pleased about that, but there is a cost in terms of increased congestion and danger on our roads. I am convinced that the bypass programme that is under way will be of major assistance. Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider the points that I have made, both about urgency and about the necessity of creating decent business connections with the new road, and perhaps be kind enough to write to me?

9.22 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I am pleased to have the opportunity, because we have some spare time tonight, to support my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on the question of the Leven-Brandsburton bypass. We should put on record the enormous amount of excellent work that my hon. Friend has done on that bypass. I am sure that all his constituents are very grateful to him for it. When the leader of the county council made that political decision, he may have thought that he would undermine my hon. Friend's position in his constituency, in fact, he did the exact opposite. I am sure that my hon. Friend did not need any additional support, but no doubt he will get significant additional support as a result.

As my hon. Friend said, the road will principally bypass a large village in his constituency, but it will end just outside a village in my constituency, and my constituency is interested for a number of reasons. First, as my hon. Friend said, there is a large industrial estate in Brandsburton which generates a considerable amount of traffic. Transline is a leading manufacturer of portable buildings. Its portable offices and homes have to be carried on large transporters, which go through Leven. At times, one wonders how they get through the main street when there is a large lorry coming the other way.

The bypass is also on the A1056 which is the main tourist artery from the west riding, Beverley and Hull into Bridlington. The tourist trade is very important to Bridlington. In the summer that road carries an enormous amount of traffic. I am afraid to say that it is a dangerous road. We have an awful lot of accidents on it, some of which have, regrettably, resulted in fatalities.

The road also has a major junction with the main road to Hornsea—again in my constituency. Hornsea is another seaside town which is dependent on the tourist trade. At Catwick, which is two miles down the road, there is another Sunday market. At the weekends the traffic is horrendous. There can be tailbacks, for several miles at this dangerous and congested place.

It was a great shock to the people of Leven, who have been waiting for the bypass for so many years, when the project was cancelled. Government approval had been granted and the Government had agreed to put up 50 per cent. of the money. The project was in the county council's budget. It was cancelled by the socialist leader of the council out of pique, because he objected to the criticisms of the council made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley.

If the Leader of the council had bothered to read my speeches he would have realised that I have been making the same criticisms as my hon. Friend for the past three or four years. Before I was privileged to be elected to this place I was the leader of the county council when the Conservatives were in control. During those years we never increased the rates by more than the rate of inflation. Since the Conservatives lost control, there has never been a year in which the rates have not increased by significantly more than the rate of inflation. Indeed, the community charge is excessive to the extent of about £90 per person.

The cancellation of the project was a bit much from Councillor Geraghty, because he has presided over one of the most profligate councils in the country. It wastes money which could well go towards the bypass on items such as fax machines for councillors, and a county council newspaper which is a propaganda publication for the Labour party.

The council has made enormous losses on an ice rink in Hull, which should never be run by the county council. It should be run by an efficient company in the leisure service. The council tried to prevent the school cleaning contract from being put out to private tender. The direct labour organisation put in a low bid and lost a fortune on the tender. Its bid was drawn up on the basis that it needed far fewer staff than were employed by the county council, but it then refused to make those staff redundant. That cost the county council about £1 million.

It is ridiculous for Councillor Geraghty to say that my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and I have it in our hands to allow the bypass to be started by putting pressure on my hon. Friend the Minister to increase the standard spending assessment. The money was already in the council's budget.

This should not be a political matter. It is a matter of the environment, safety, people's lives and children's lives. The road is a death trap. It bisects my hon. Friend's village. The traffic is so bad that for many days in the year it is not a village but two villages. One hears many a time criticism from the Opposition Benches that we are putting money before people and before lives. This is a case in which the socialist county council is putting politics before people and the safety of men, women and children.

Mr. Cran: My hon. Friend remarked that the county council is spending about £90 per person over the figure that it should spend. Does he agree that if the county council undertook a proper review of its expenditure across its activities, both he and I would have no difficulty? In this case the county council has not done that. It has not conducted itself in the proper business fashion. It has chosen one capital item to achieve such savings as it would like. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is not the way to run a business?

Mr. Townend: I agree 100 per cent. The fallaciousness of the leader of the county council's position and, given his reason for not going ahead with the bypass, his dishonesty, have been revealed in the past two weeks when the county council decided to go ahead with a relief road for an industrial estate in south Humberside. If the county council did not have the money for the Leven bypass, which was provided for in the budget and for which the council has Government money, how can it go ahead with the other relief road?

One of the problems that I have heard about on the grapevine—there was also a clip in the local paper about it—is that the county council committees are grossly overspending this year's budget. That is terrible; no wonder there has been so much rejoicing in Humberside that that official region will come to an end. The people of South Humberside will join Lincolnshire, according to the recommendations of the Boundary Commission and they will get the benefit of the efficient and carefully run Lincolnshire county council, which has a Tory majority. I am afraid that some of the rejoicing is premature, however, because under the present recommendations we on the north bank will still be under the iron heel of Councillor Geraghty. He has already said that he does not intend to take any notice of the Boundary Commission and that he will not change the name of Humberside back to East Yorkshire, which we all want.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the dafter left-wing councils are busy talking themselves out of existence? Derby city council, which covers part of my constituency and is Tory-controlled, has said that it wants to be a unitary authority and shot of the county council. South Derbyshire district council, which covers the other part of my constituency and which is Labour-controlled, has also said that it wants to be a unitary authority and shot of the council. The local Labour party has expressed its belief that the county council should be abolished—the Conservatives certainly believe that it should be. The only people in favour of retaining the silly idiots on the county council are the silly idiots themselves.

Mr. Townend: I find that extremely interesting, as we have a similar state of affairs in our part of the world.

We have quite a sensible Labour leader in the city of Hull, Councillor Doyle. He has taken a pragmatic approach to the abolition of the national dock labour scheme and he has encouraged private investment. Councillor Doyle and the Labour majority on Hull council —this is what happened with the district council in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie)—want to do away with Councillor Geraghty and the idiots on the county council who are an embarrassment to the Labour party.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is listening carefully, as this issue is part of his Department's responsibilities. Now that we are to get rid of Humberside, we want to scrap all the district and county councils. We want two new unitary authorities in North Humberside.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I realise that the hon. Gentleman has been provoked to some extent, but we are talking about bypasses.

Mr. Townend: With respect, if we get the right form of local government, we will make sure that we get our bypass.

We would like a unitary authority in Hull—I have to admit that it would be Labour controlled for time evermore—and we would like another unitary authority based in Beverley covering the area of the old Holderness and East Yorkshire district councils. It would be the new East Yorkshire unitary authority. Our people would have East Yorkshire back and an efficient, Conservative-controlled council.

If my hon. Friend has any leverage that he can use on the county council to make it get on with the bypass, I beg him to use it. If he does so he will be the hero of all the residents of Leven and Brandesburton.

9.33 pm

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): There are few areas of Government involvement at a local level which stir the indigenous population to greater emotion than the perceived or real need for a bypass—such emotions being exceeded only by those aroused when the proposed route is published, when a new set of emotions come into play as part of the not-in-my-backyard syndrome.

Listening to the previous speakers, I was tempted to think—as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, obviously thought—that we were about to have a debate on the errors of local government. I could throw myself wholeheartedly into that subject, and I fully appreciate the feelings that have been expressed on the various local issues.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) for giving us the opportunity to debate the Government's bypass programme. I must qualify my initial remarks by making the obvious point that, although bypasses generate an enormous amount of discussion locally and on the Conservative Benches, it is incredible that only one solitary Member is present to represent the Opposition. He arrived halfway through the debate, but I am delighted to see him and give him full marks for staying. It is incredible that not even an Opposition Whip is here to record what is going on in a programme which involves not hundreds of millions but billions of pounds. My hon. Friend the Minister told me earlier that it will provide enough work to keep the Department busy for 20 years or more. That is a measure of the size of the programme.

I shall not come to the rescue of my hon. Friend the Minister because I am sure that he needs no rescuing but, whereas other hon. Members have been projecting the plights within their constituencies, I wish to say a few kind words to my hon. Friend about what is happening in my constituency.

A unique distinction can be drawn between the constituencies of all the other hon. Members who have spoken and my constituency. Every constituency—whether Beverley, South Derbyshire, Harborough, Linlithgow or Bridlington—has a multiplicity of choices of roads going in and out. Trunk roads go north or south into Bridlington, but in the constituency of Barrow and Furness, which is one hour's drive away from the nearest motorway, the M6, only one trunk road goes in and only one goes out, and it is the same one because we have the sea on three sides. Therefore, the question of a bypass in my constituency, along the route of the A590 meandering its way to the M6, is of prime importance.

The old Dalton-in-Furness urban district council made its first plea for a bypass in 1937. After decades, it looked as though the bypass would finally be built in the mid-1970s. I remind hon. Members that Barrow is one of the three major industrial bases of the north-west—Manchester, Liverpool and Barrow. The shipyards and the engineering complex in Barrow form the largest heavy engineering complex in western Europe. That gives an idea of the volume of heavy traffic that goes up and down the solitary road from the M6 to Barrow. At one point along the A590, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), the road literally goes through a farmyard.

At one stage, in the mid-1970s, the Dalton-in-Furness bypass was about to be built. Then, lo and behold, we had a Labour Government and a financial crises. The International Monetary Fund was called in, and out through the window went all the bypasses that had been in the programme for years. Once again Barrow was back where it started and Dalton-in-Furness was back where it started.

I was elected in 1983, so I am one of the class of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and I too remember the kindness of my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). One thing that struck me as obvious when I was elected was that the only way to broaden the economic base was by improved communications. There is no other way to encourage small businesses and industry to locate themselves in a region unless two prime criteria are met. The first is a good local work force, who are reliable and available, and the second is mobility, which good communications bring.

I made it one of my top priorities to try to get the Dalton-in-Furness bypass proposal moving once again. There have been a succession of Ministers. My right hon. Friend the present Minister for Overseas Development came to visit Dalton-in-Furness in 1984. For the benefit of the local and national media, we arranged a photocall in Dalton. Such is the way of the world that, at 3 pm that Friday when all the press and photographers were present, there was not a lorry to be seen for the next 10 minutes. As soon as a lorry came, the photograph was taken and we all left. There was then a half-mile traffic jam at 3.30 pm as the shipyards closed and all hell broke loose. No traffic could move in either direction.

In 1986, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) came to see the proposed bypass and made all the necessary promises. Once again, we arranged for a photograph—this time at 11 am, rather than 3 pm. That visit was followed by one from my hon. Friend the present Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, who arrived by train. The chairman of my association and I met him at the railway station just outside Kendal. The chairman and I were astonished that the train was on time. The Minister was not astonished; he was delighted and told me how impressed he was. He was none too pleased when I said that it helped when the train driver knew that a Minister of State from the Department of Transport was on board.

We drove through the farmyard at High Newton, along the A590, at Ulverston and Dalton and eventually arrived at Barrow. Like all his predecessors, the Minister was

convinced of the need for a bypass. I hope that, in the fulness of time, in November, the present occupant of the relevant ministerial post will pay his respects to the town.

I compliment the Minister, who in June announced that the invitation to tender for the road would be made in August and the construction would start in November. We have had the line of route and the public inquiry and we are now at the stage when building can commence. To pick up the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South, I am also extremely apprehensive at the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hall, East (Mr. Prescott). If for no other reason than the Dalton bypass, the general election should be postponed until after November. I have checked with the hon. Gentleman and received no answer except the reaffirmation that if there is an election and a Labour Government came to power, there will be an immediate moratorium on bypasses. I cannot for the life of me understand the logic of that.

Bypasses do not happen overnight, but take years and years. First, a bypass must be in a programme, then a line of route is published, then there is a public inquiry—because there are inevitably objections—eventually the inspector makes his recommendations, the Minister makes an announcement on the preferred line of route and then the invitations to tender are put out. That process does not happen overnight. I do not want to see happen in my constituency or in any other Member's constituency—irrespective of party—what happened in my constituency and so many other hon. Members' constituencies in 1976.

Mr. John Townend: Why does my hon. Friend think that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made that statement? Was it an indication that the Labour party is anti-car and anti-car-owner?

Mr. Franks: Labour has a kind of love-hate relationship with the public. It is producer-oriented rather than consumer-oriented, and it is in thrall to the unions. The motorist does not have a union, unless it be the Automobile Association and he is not a member of a group representing his interests which contributes money to Labour party funds. Therefore, that party is much minded to abolish private transport and to encourage everyone to use public transport instead. There is a place in any sensible society for both.

The number of motorists is growing simply because people want independence and to be able to travel to whichever destination they choose—in their own time, at their own pace, and at their own convenience. They would prefer to do that rather than to wait for trains that never arrive—or which do arrive, but two hours late.

I compliment my hon. Friend the Minister and thank him, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough for including the Dalton-in-Furness bypass as one of his Department's demonstration projects. Dalton-in-Furness and the borough of Barrow will greatly welcome it. When my hon. Friend winds up, perhaps he will elaborate on the funding that is available for the schemes that project teams recommend. I understand that they operate on a 50-50 partnership basis with the local authority. Will my hon. Friend confirm that such funds are available, and say whether they are available to a local authority to match funds from the Department of Transport?

I repeat my thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister. My constituents are extremely grateful that construction is about to commence on the bypass for which they have waited for 54 years. I hope that the 55th year will see its opening. I hope also that my hon. Friend the Minister will follow his illustrious predecessors and come to see the little town of Dalton and cut the first sod of the bypass.

9.48 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on his Adjournment debate. It has ranged around the country and to the north of England, and I will speak for the south.

Reading's problem is that an important river—the River Thames—runs through the centre of the town, which presents a major traffic problem. Reading badly needs a third bridge because, despite its two existing bridges, it suffers major traffic congestion. Reading has to reach agreement with Berkshire and Oxfordshire on a line for the bridge, and that process has been under way ever since I first entered the House 17 years ago. My problems with that bridge—like those of my hon. Friends—go on and on.

We have at last succeeded in making some progress, with the A329M extension, which runs off the M4 into Reading. The Speyhawk construction company has built a tunnel under the Great Western railway into the estate, which runs right alongside the river. The problem of going over or under the railway has in that way been solved, with a route close to the river bank.

We have a developer who is prepared to pay for the construction of a bridge. Not many people are prepared to do such a thing. The bridge would cross the river right at the end of the A329M extension, but the problem is that its other end would be in Oxfordshire—and Oxfordshire does not want it. It has decided that the Oxfordshire county is a rural county, and should remain so. The county is terrified that any further encroachment by a bridge, road, or anything else will bring fresh development.

Eventually, the Department will have to arbitrate in the battle between Oxfordshire and Berkshire, or there will never be agreement about the location of the bridge. A developer is prepared to build the bridge and there are roads going to it and on the other side. The proposal is for the east of Reading but there have been proposals for a bridge on the west. There will be no agreement between the councils until the Government say that the traffic situation is so bad that a line will have to be decided. After that, there will be public inquiries and so on, and the bridge might be built.

The little village of Sonning has a bridge that was built hundreds of years ago and traffic rumbles through the village day and night on a single lane with traffic lights. If the bridge were built, it would relieve that village of enormous pressure. I ask the Government to see if there is some way in which they can intervene. My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) spoke about having meetings with Ministers and seeing photographs. I have had meetings and many promises, but I have never seen photographs or had any news from the meetings. The Department should consider a third bridge to relieve Reading's heavy traffic.

9.51 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on initiating a debate on such an interesting and

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

useful subject. I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks), because I know well the road that he mentioned. My hon. Friend has done an excellent job of lobbying for improvements which I am sure will benefit his constituents. The engineering centre of Vickers is one of the largest such complexes in Europe; I am sure that the industrial benefits of the road will be great and that it will also improve the daily lives of my hon. Friend's constituents.

The debate is an opportunity for me to remind the Minister of the need for a northern relief road in my constituency. His predecessors have been acquainted with that need. His immediate predecessor recently visited Bolton, was presented with a petition, and was able to see the line of the road and the great need for it. The predecessor of that Minister met a delegation from Bolton, when Councillor John Walsh and I came to see him to press upon him the need for the road.

The proposed road has a long history, going back to 1947 when Turton council prepared plans for the line of this northern relief road, which was much needed even then. Turton's successor, Bolton council, surveyed the route, and the Conservative-controlled council acquired the necessary land, cleared houses and was ready to build the bypass. Unfortunately, in 1980, control of the council passed to Labour, and at that time Greater Manchester council, which was also Labour-controlled and was ultimately responsible for the building of the road, turned down the plans. Later, when the Labour-controlled Bolton council acquired authority for roads from the GMC, it again turned down the plan.

There is stalemate. The land has been acquired for the road, but the council will not construct it. I do not know why it should adopt that attitude, because the need is greater now than when the road was first planned in 1947. Millions of transport supplementary grant are being spent on junction improvements on the Crompton way bypass which crosses the line of the two roads which need relief —the A666 Blackburn road and the Tonge Moor road. I hope that those improvements will alleviate congestion, but they are not the solution that people want.

The relief road is very much needed because of the effect on the quality of life in Blackburn road and Tonge Moor road, where there is very heavy traffic. It is like a wall of steel dividing the communities. In crossing that road, I know that one dices with death. Children have been run down, and adults injured, if not killed. A French articulated lorry ran over one of my constituents who was in his car, but he was unable to obtain any compensation. A great deal of suffering has resulted from the decision not to build the northern relief road.

I hope that my hon. Friend will visit my constituency, as his predecessor did, and see the line of the road. We could walk along it together. To go through the valley where the road is planned would make a very pleasant walk. I could show my hon. Friend how much the relief road would improve the quality of life for my constituents. It would also reduce congestion, which costs so much money. The chamber of commerce is in favour of the northern relief road. Constituents have complained about how long it takes them to get to hospital and also about how long it takes doctors and emergency services to get through, due to the congestion on the roads.

The relief road has been needed for a very long time. The Labour council is more interested in the Labour areas of the town than in what they look upon as the northern Conservative dormitories. The relief road would improve the quality of life of people in the inner part of the city as well as the quality of life of those who live in the outer parts, who so much need the new road. I hope that my hon. Friend will find an opportunity to visit my constituency and see the line of the new road for himself. I hope that he will also encourage the council to put in bids for the necessary grants, which I trust would be available, so that the council could build this very much needed road.

9.56 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on securing, at a very civilised hour, this timely debate, and for his excellent speech initiating a spirited discussion. My hon. Friend referred to what those who heard him will think of as an almost incredible story of perverse and vindictive behaviour by the Humberside county council—motivated, I understand, by the political pique of some of the socialist county councillors. What is going on in Humberside will probably be known to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). I hope that, in due course, he will comment upon this saga and reply to the criticisms that have been made during the debate of the socialist programme for roads.

When my hon. Friend came to see me last autumn to discuss the case for the Leven and Brandesburton bypass, he brought with him, as he said in his speech, some photographs, together with some of the people who are directly affected. That evidence, coupled with other evidence, was very impressive. My hon. Friend referred to the evidence produced by Humberside county council in support of the bypass scheme and to the improvements to the environment that would result from it. My hon. Friend said that it would lead to major accident savings—a precise quote from the case put by the Humberside county council.

It is therefore extraordinary that the county council should now be at the threshold—perhaps it has already gone beyond it—of saying that it does not intend to pursue the scheme any further. As a result of the debate, I hope that the county council will have been shamed into including the Leven and Brandesburton bypass once again in its programme. It has the money for it; all it needs is the political will to implement it. If I may expand on why the county council has the money, when the scheme was accepted—in competition with many other schemes throughout the country—for transport supplementary grant in the current year, the Government said that they would be able to pay 50 per cent. in transport supplementary grant, and that the other 50 per cent. would effectively be provided by the national taxpayer, at no expense to the local charge payer. That is an important point.

Humberside county councillors are suggesting that going ahead with the bypass would impose an additional burden on Humberside charge payers. I assure the House that that is not so. In effect, the bypass would be 100 per cent. funded by taxpayers, because of the detailed way in

which we apply resources—half in the form of transport supplementary grant and half in the form of annual capital guideline cover. The extra annual——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Mr. Chope: Annual capital guideline cover means that a council gets extra credit approval, which increases the authority's standard spending assessment above what it would otherwise be. That results in the authority getting more revenue support grant to cover the interest on and repayment of the capital. Anyone who suggested to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley that the cost of the bypass would increase the burden on Humberside charge payers was totally wrong.

Mrs. Currie: We are all sitting here with our ears flapping. Do my hon. Friend's comments apply to other bypasses, or do these extraordinary circumstances apply only to Beverley?

Mr. Chope: This principle applies to all the schemes that are included when we make our announcement on TSG. This year, that included an addition of 17 per cent. in the sums being made available. This is not the only time that a socialist local authority has tried to misinterpret the rules and to imply that, because it has different political priorities, it will take its feelings out on part of the area and deprive it of a bypass which would otherwise be available.

My hon. Friends the Members for Beverley and for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) asked what could be done and whether it was too late for Humberside to change its attitude. Because the council said that it no longer wanted to proceed with the bypass, they wanted to know if the money would not be available and if it could not be restored.

If Humberside county council quickly relents, the scheme can be brought back into the programme. The money is available this year, and it will continue to be available unless the county council tells the Department of Transport that it no longer wishes to proceed with the scheme. If the council no longer wishes to proceed or if it is slow in doing so, a process called "denaming" takes place, whereby the resources that were available for that scheme become available for another scheme. I hope that Humberside county councillors will not be so petty as to deprive their citizens of the benefit of the public expenditure which, because of the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley, is directed towards this much-needed bypass.

Many other subjects were covered in the debate. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) drew attention to the addition of Skeffington to the road programme, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced today, and to the inclusion of the A6 Market Harborough bypass in the demonstration project—one of six schemes in that project.

My hon. Friends the Members for Harborough and for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) asked for more detail on the bypass demonstration project. Reference was first made to it last year in the environment White Paper as a means of maximising the environmental benefit flowing from the large bypass programme which the Government brought about. The essence of the project is to introduce traffic calming and to conduct a study of circumstances before and after work to ascertain the best way of ensuring that maximum benefits, in terms of quality of life and the environment, go to the people who use the town or village that is bypassed.

I can understand that hon. Members who do not follow the modern jargon used by roads traffic engineers would not be familiar with the expression "traffic calming". It means the introduction of road humps, road narrowing, additional pedestrian crossings and engineering measures designed to reduce the speed of traffic, to enhance safety of pedestrians and cyclists and to discourage fast through traffic from using that area.

We invited tenders for the by-pass demonstration project from all local authorities and we received many bids. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the six winners today. The towns that are to be bypassed have in common the need to maximise the benefits of the bypass once it is complete, and I am sure that that will be facilitated with the assistance of local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness asked exactly how much money would be available, and he referred to 50 per cent. being the norm. We have not yet decided the precise amount. It will depend on one scheme being compared with another, and no individual scheme will receive a specified amount of help from the Government. We hope that we shall receive support from the Civic Trust. Most of the central funding will go towards the cost of analysing the potential benefits of the project, and the local authorities that have agreed to participate have agreed to provide some of the funds for the engineering measures, but let us not forget that the principal cost of any bypass is borne by the national taxpayer through the national roads programme.

Mr. Franks: On the Minister's comments on traffic calming, a most unusual phrase about which some of us are now a little wiser, are there procedures in legislation whereby the Government can prohibit lorries from using the old road when a bypass has been constructed, or is that a matter for local authorities rather than the Government to determine?

Mr. Chope: If my hon. Friend is referring to the time during construction, it is possible for temporary traffic regulation orders to be made. For example, we are considering that at the moment on a scheme in east London, but it is a matter for local authorities to take in hand.

Mr. Franks: I was talking about the period after the bypass has been built specifically to take heavy traffic away from the town. Can the purpose of the bypass be enhanced or enforced by the prohibition of heavy traffic along the old road?

Mr. Chope: Yes, the answer to that question is also affirmative. When the bypass is complete, traffic regulation orders can be made to prohibit vehicles of a particular weight or size from using that road unless they need to do so to gain access to a premises along it. That will force them to use the bypass that has been provided.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough raised the important issue of the gap between the A1 and the Theddingworth bypass in Leicestershire, on which, he says, Leicestershire county council has neglected to act for about 25 years. I am afraid that I can do little more than

[Mr. Chope]

offer sympathy, because it is a local road scheme and not one for which the Department is responsible. I hope that my hon. Friend will be successful in persuading the county council of the need to include it in its programme. He says that there is a possibility of its starting in 1992, so perhaps that is a sign of his success in bringing pressure to bear on the issue over the years. I wish him well on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) referred to the importance of bypass construction in her constituency and sought an assurance that the Stoke-Derby link road programme would not slip. It is always difficult, especially for a Transport Minister, to guarantee that a road programme will not slip. However, I accept my hon. Friend's pressure about the fact that she does not wish that programme to slip, and I will write to her with more details about that and other issues that she raised.

One of the most interesting parts of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South was the reference to the Opposition parties' policies—or lack of them—in relation to road building. She referred to the speech made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East in Edinburgh in April. She said that she had written to him as a result of it, asking what the implications might be for road investment in her constituency. I have also written to the hon. Gentleman and I have yet to receive a reply. I am sure that it is not because he has overlooked the matter and that a reply will come in due course. I asked him which of the 53 new schemes that the Government are introducing into their national road programme this year he would wish to stop. I hope that we shall receive a reply in due course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South also referred, in an exchange with my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough, to Liberal Democrat policy on road investment. I confirm to the House that it very much depends on which audience is being addressed. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) when speaking to a rally of cyclists in London, as I heard him the other day, suggested that no more money needed to be spent on national roads other than perhaps to deal with some of the potholes. He said that the Liberal Democrates were not in favour of expanding the roads programme and, indeed, would be in favour of reducing it.

However, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has lobbied persistently and successfully for a widening of the bypass round Ilminster so that it can become a dual carriageway. I hope that I shall not get too much criticism from my hon. Friend when I tell the House that the Government announced today that the right hon. Gentleman's pleas for his own constituents had been acceded to and that the Ilminster bypass dualling is now included in the roads programme. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will now adopt a slightly different attitude on whether he wishes the roads programme to be expanded or contracted. We wait to find out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness also referred to the attitude of the Labour party on these issues. The views of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East largely depend on which audience he is addressing. If he is addressing a group of railwaymen, he argues that all the investment needs to be put into the railways. If he is addressing a group of lorry drivers, he says how important it is that there should be continued investment in the roads because lorry drivers have an important job. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness for exploiting the inconsistencies in the policies of Opposition parties.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) doubtless has many shortcomings, as do we all, but in my experience one thing that he does not do is tell audiences what they want to hear.

Mr. Chope: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the most effective defence that could be brought in the circumstances. We shall now follow the speeches of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East with even greater interest to see whether the comments of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) are borne out in practice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) referred, in a typically persuasive contribution, to the problem of the third river crossing which almost everyone in Reading wishes to see, but which nobody in Oxfordshire seems to wish to see. He asked the Department of Transport to arbitrate in the matter. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has visited one place nearby and that he has received representations on the issue, as I have. There is certainly the will to resolve the problem. However, we have not yet found a way to do that because the powers of the Department of Transport are not that extensive. We will continue to explore all possibilities because the traffic problems of Reading will not be resolved until that issue is properly and successfully addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) kindly invited me to visit his constituency. I should be happy to do that at some stage in the future, perhaps when the road problems to which he referred have been resolved to the extent that I can turn the first sod. I look forward to visiting Barrow-in-Furness in November to carry out such a duty with my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness.

I waited till the end before referring to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, because I knew that he would be patient, as always. He referred to the need for additional road infrastructure investment in Scotland for roads and road junctions that he uses, although I am not sure whether they are in his constituency. He said that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), was dealing with his representations because he is the Minister responsible for roads in Scotland. I cannot go into the details, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will consider the points that have been raised in this debate.

Mr. Dalyell: This is a grey area. All I ask is that, the next time the Secretary of State for Transport is locked in a traffic jam between his home in his constituency and Edinburgh airport and is desperate to get to a Cabinet sub-committee meeting, he at least thinks of my contribution today and wonders what can be done to alleviate the problem. Seriously, I ask the Minister to bring the matter to the attention of the Secretary of State for Transport, who knows from first-hand experience exactly what the problem is. Someone will have to do something about it.

Mr. Chope: I will certainly do that, in the knowledge that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport supports the principle that we need further investment in road infrastructure.

I was sorry to hear from the hon. Member for Linlithgow about the terrible accident on the A1. I do not know whether further investment in the road would have prevented the accident. However, sadly, almost all the people who were killed in the accident were unseated in the back of the van. That is a matter of considerable concern, and the Department of Transport is considering the implications of the accident. If someone is seated and belted in a vehicle, that person is more likely to survive an accident.

The Government are committed to continuing investment in the roads programme and in the bypass programme in particular. We have made substantial investment over the past 10 or 12 years in national and local bypasses. Today has been a particularly good day for those of us who believe in such investment. We have added 15 new bypasses to the national programme at a cost of £85 million, and we have announced the first six towns for the bypass demonstration project.

We have heard the case for even more investment in roads. By investing in roads, we can improve the environment and road safety and make a valuable contribution to improving the economy. That is why the Conservative party alone among political parties, continues unashamedly to claim that we must continue to invest as much as we can afford in road infrastructure—not at the expense of investing in other forms of transportation, but as a complement to such investment. Only through long-term capital investment in transport can we improve our quality of life.

It is not too late for Humberside county council to change its attitude. If there is no other consequence of this debate, I hope that the county council and its leader will be shamed into restoring that much-needed Leven bypass scheme so that work can start on it this year.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made,

That the Promoters of the British Railways (No. 3) Bill *[Lords]* shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office of their intention to suspend further proceedings not later than the day before the close of the present Session and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first and shall be ordered to be read a second time;

That the Petitions against the Bill presented in the present Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the present Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.— *[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Object. (Hon. Members:)

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL

Motion made,

That the Promoters of the British Railways Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the present Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and, having been amended by the Committee in the present Session, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.— *[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

MERSEY DOCKS AND HARBOUR BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Bill *[Lords]* shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office no later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That, if that Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

Ordered,

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

Ordered,

That the Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the present Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

Ordered,

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the present Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

Ordered,

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.— *[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

EC Social Action Programme

1. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment has been made of the cost to British employers of immediate implementation of all provisions of the European Commission's social action programme.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): It is not possible to estimate the cost of implementation of all the social action programme as only half the proposals have so far been published. However, it is estimated that the implementation of the directives on working time, part-time work and pregnant women would alone cost United Kingdom employers at least £3·5 billion.

Mr. Conway: I am sure that the House would wish to join me in congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend on his 50th birthday which he celebrated on Sunday. He is wearing considerably better than many of us. While my right hon. and learned Friend is reflecting on that milestone in his life and on future policy, will he tell us whether under these proposals nearly 2 million of our low-paid citizens would be forced to pay national insurance contributions? Would not that be a retrograde step and is it not surprising that Labour would support such a policy?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind wishes. One might have thought it surprising for Labour to support a measure that would place such a burden on those on low pay, but nothing about Labour's attitude to those on low incomes or low pay any longer surprises me. Later today we shall debate some of Labour's proposals which would wreak havoc on those on low incomes and low pay, and would lead to the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Secretary of State aware that many men in my constituency who are celebrating their 50th birthday are not anywhere near being in the same happy circumstances as the right hon. and learned Gentleman because his policies have put many of them out of jobs? Is he further aware that of all the post-war holders of his office he has the worst record on unemployment? Did that fact help him to celebrate his 50th birthday?

Mr. Howard: The original question is about the social action programme. The hon. Gentleman should appreciate that that programme, which is fully supported by his party, would add to the ranks of the unemployed. If the hon. Gentleman is seriously concerned about the plight of the unemployed, which I am sure he is, as am I, he should start persuading his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to stop pursuing policies which would gratuitously make unemployment worse.

Mr. Irvine: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the European Commission has introduced the social action programme under the provisions of article 100A with a view to making it possible for the programme to be enacted by a qualified majority only? Does he agree that article 100A is not the appropriate article? What steps is he taking to challenge the European Commission on that point?

Mr. Howard: Not all the proposals in the social action programme are being brought forward under article 100A, but my hon. Friend is right to say that some are, and they are being introduced on the most tenuous basis. I make it quite clear in the Social Affairs Council of Ministers that that is the case. If necessary, at the end of the day we shall not hesitate to take these matters to the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is the Secretary of State aware that the only figure that he has quoted today that has any credibility is that of his 50th birthday, and even that we shall check? Is he aware also that, as with the minimum wage, the figures that he has quoted about the cost of the social action programme are completely bogus? Why is it that the Government stand alone within the Community in setting their face steadfastly against any progress being made for employees at their places of work? Why are they so determined to undermine the conditions of Britons only? Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman realise that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) is no longer Prime Minister?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. It never ceases to amaze me that the Labour party clings to such myths. Why does not the hon. Gentleman try to ascertain what really happens at the Council of Ministers, including what happened at its last meeting? We were not isolated. We were not alone. Other member states are finding it increasingly difficult to sign up for directives. They are becoming increasingly aware of the problems that will be posed for them. They are frequently grateful to the United Kingdom Government for the constructive role that we consistently play in the Council's deliberations.

Executive Job Clubs

2. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further measures he will take to increase the number of executive job clubs; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): On 19 June my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment announced a further 40,000 places this year in job clubs. My right hon. and learned Friend has asked the Employment Service to take the needs of unemployed white-collar workers and executives into account when it puts this extra provision into effect.

Mr. Colvin: That is, indeed, good news. The evidence from the Southampton executive job club, which serves my constituency, is that it is doing well. Perhaps my hon. Friend will tell us a little more about the national picture. How many people will be able to enrol in job clubs and how many have done so? What is the percentage of placements back in employment? Has the Department undertaken any research to judge the cost-effectiveness of executive job clubs compared with Professional and Executive Recruitment, PER, which they replaced?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right about the success of the Southampton executive job club. There was a 68 per

cent. positive outcome in that job club during 1990-91. Overall, there are more than 1,000 job clubs with 156,000 people making use of them. Of those who have gone through the clubs, 16 per cent. have gone into professional and managerial jobs. There are 30 executive clubs throughout the country and they are proving to be extremely successful. We shall, obviously, monitor the progress of the clubs. We are conducting research to see how and in what way we should expand the provision. As I have said, the clubs seem to have been extremely successful.

Mr. Madden: What emergency action is the Department of Employment taking to give advice and help to the staff of BICC, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, who face redundancy and great uncertainty about their future? What other help and advice is being given to safeguard the employment of those employed by small businesses who are dependent on the bank?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman seems to have his initials wrong. Obviously, it is extremely serious when something takes place of the sort to which he has referred. He is right to draw attention to the full range of facilities that are operated by the Employment Service, which can help many people who find themselves in difficulties with employment. The hon. Gentleman's advice, that they should make use of the service, should be taken.

Mr. Burns: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that a new job club is shortly to be opened in Chelmsford? Does he agree—*[Interruption.]*—that job clubs have an extremely good record on successfully helping people back into jobs?

Mr. Jackson: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his positive attitude to job clubs. I noticed that it attracted some derision from Opposition Members. They should reflect on the considerable help that has been given to people through job clubs. Before they laugh and sneer at the clubs, they should consider the serious contribution that job clubs are making.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

3. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to ensure that all employees have a right to a written statement of terms and conditions within 13 weeks of commencement of employment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Employees already have such a right under current employment protection legislation.

Mr. Thompson: Is the Minister aware that citizens advice bureaux throughout Britain have evidence that not only are employers ignoring the requirement to give a written statement of terms and conditions, but some are deliberately not meeting that requirement? Is it not time for those who are employed for 16 hours a week also to have such a written statement?

Mr. Forth: If, as the hon. Gentleman alleges, there is widespread breaching of the requirement, employees should go to industrial tribunals which are well equipped to deal with such problems. I hope that citizens advice bureaux are giving the correct advice in that regard. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that there is an EC directive covering that point which, regrettably, has not yet been passed because the European Parliament could not give an opinion. However, it is almost certain that that directive will become EC law in the foreseeable future. It will make certain changes, including the one that the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Knapman: Is my hon. Friend aware that 151 Members of the House are sponsored by trade unions? Does that make them delegates rather than representatives and are they entitled to a written contract of employment?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point which I shall consider and take due account of.

Mr. Skinner: But what about the 250 Tory Members of Parliament who are lining their pockets with directorships, 62 of whom are Lloyd's names and wanted to be bailed out by the taxpayer? What about their terms and conditions? At the next general election the Tories had better set up a training agency to search for jobs for all those Tory Members who will lose their seats, because they will need one.

Mr. Forth: I am impressed with the hon. Gentleman's care and concern for the categories of people whom he has just mentioned. Any people who find themselves in difficult circumstances should go to him because, obviously, he is anxious to help them.

Training (Young People)

4. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Government training places for young people were available in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* the last year for which he has figures.

Mr. Jackson: In 1978-79 there were on average about 7,000 young people receiving training in the youth opportunities programme compared with more than 300,000 now in youth training.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Those figures clearly show a real commitment to training. Does my hon. Friend recall that when we first gave young people a guarantee that at 16 they could have a job, a place in higher education or a place on a training scheme, the Opposition wanted young people to continue to have the option of voluntary idleness? Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Opposition and the trade unions have consistently blocked every move that the Government have ever made to provide for our young people? Will he further confirm that they have never given the kind of guarantees or brought forward the initiatives that have come from the Government Front Bench?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We saw an exhibition of that in the Opposition's sneering during an answer to a question about job clubs a few minutes ago. The Government have substantially increased expenditure on youth training, with positive results. Of those who complete youth training, 89 per cent. go into jobs, further education or further training, and 67 per cent. of them obtain vocational qualifications. It is time to stop knocking youth training and it would be useful if the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) took

this opportunity to condemn yesterday's vote at the Transport and General Workers Union to boycott youth training.

Mr. Leighton: Does the Under-Secretary of State realise that he loses all credibility when he sounds so complacent? Does he realise that yesterday the British Printing Industries Federation pulled out of youth training and that two clearing banks and many large companies, such as Mothercare, have pulled out? There is now a crisis in youth training. As I told the Minister two months ago, hundreds of young people are leaving school in the London borough of Newham and the east end of London without jobs and without youth training places. As everyone, including the local training and enterprise councils, says, we need more cash now. What will the Under-Secretary of State do about it?

Mr. Jackson: Everyone agrees that the local character of the training and enterprise councils is one of their great strengths, but clearly that constitutes some problems for training providers that are organised on a national basis, of which there are some 140. That is why the Department installed the training national providers unit which has been helping to broker the relations between the national providers and the TECs. Only 5 per cent. of the national providers, 10 out of 140, have failed to establish a new relationship with the TECs, but they are all continuing with their training. We regret losing them, but the benefits that come from the localisation of the TECs are considerable.

Mr. Harris: I welcome those figures, which show that there has been truly spectacular progress. Does my hon. Friend accept, however, that a problem is beginning to develop? Some young people are unable to obtain training, simply because they cannot find placements. The problem is especially bad in my constituency, St. Ives in west Cornwall, where young people cannot find employers to give them training. Will my hon. Friend consult the TECs about that problem, which, I fear, will worsen over the next few months?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right, as, indeed, was the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton). We are firmly committed to the YT guarantee, although we do not yet know how many school leavers there will be or how many people will enter the programme. Placements will, obviously, be affected by the current economic situation. We are, however, keeping the position under review and we are already in contact with the TECs.

Mr. Fatchett: Was not the Under-Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) remarkably complacent? When large organisations, such as the British Printing Industries Federation, the Midland bank and Mothercare, are pulling out of YT schemes, should not the Government do more than simply express concern, as the hon. Gentleman did? He washed his hands of the problem. Is it not time for action and for the Under-Secretary of State to recognise the difficulties to which those employers have drawn attention? Does he appreciate that it is impossible for them to negotiate with the 82 TECs? Or is he happy to allow YT to wither on the vine as a result of the cuts that have already been made in the budget?

Mr. Jackson: That was quite a routine. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to accuse anyone of complacency, he should take account of the complacency that he is exhibiting in the face of yesterday's vote by the Transport and General Workers Union, and of his failure to take the opportunity that I offered him to dissociate himself from it. The Government are now spending £844 million on youth training. In 1979, when Labour was last in power, it spent £7·4 million. Labour Members are in no position to lecture us.

Mr. Marland: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason for the small number of training places that were available in the late 1970s was because industry had been subjected to so many years of Labour Government? The Government of those days sought to support restrictive practices, to restrict prices and interfere with company management. Does my hon. Friend agree that the worst news on earth for any trainee would be news of the return of a Labour Government?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, the position was even worse than he suggested: the Labour Government paid no attention whatever to the need for youth training.

Employment Action Programme

5. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of places available per parliamentary constituency through his employment action programme.

Mr. Howard: Training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies in Scotland will shortly be invited to submit proposals to deliver employment action in their local areas. As parliamentary constituency boundaries and TEC and LEC boundaries are not the same, it will not be possible to say what the distribution of employment action places will be within parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Foulkes: I thought that the Secretary of State would shy away from answering my question. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that in my constituency and, indeed, throughout the country many projects exist that could benefit from an employment action programme? Many more places are needed, however, and those involved in the programme need to be paid the rate for the job, instead of being used as slave labour.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman may care to reflect on the utter inconsistency of the two points that he has made. If the scheme were introduced with those involved being paid the rate for the job, it would be possible to provide roughly one third of the number of places that we shall provide next year.

Sir Michael Marshall: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take this opportunity to support the moves being made through the programme to combat agism? Does he agree that, given the current demographic changes, it is important to look for opportunities to employ the over-50s, as well as to carry out the necessary work for the youth training scheme?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Jobcentres and the Employment Service generally are playing a full part in countering the difficulties that those

who are over 50 experience in finding jobs. I now have a personal interest in that matter. The private sector is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of its role and it is taking its responsibilities increasingly seriously.

Mr. McLeish: Why is it that, when faced with 965,000 people unemployed for over 26 weeks, the Government can find in this financial year 30,000 places only? Why is it, when faced with a bill for £16·4 billion to support the unemployed, the Government can provide only £110 million to get the unemployed back to work? Is the Secretary of State happy with that or will he continue to be the apologist for poverty pay in Britain?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows, or should know, full well that in this financial year we will provide through our various programmes help for an additional 190,000 people, over and above the 650,000 we are already helping. Next year we shall help a quarter of a million people in addition to those 650,000 whom we would be helping anyway—that is a total of 900,000 people. We will not take any lectures on the funding of these programmes from the Labour party when we know that none of these matters comes within the two immediate spending priorities that are the only things to which the shadow Chief Secretary will commit herself and her party.

EC Employment Directives

6. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations over the EC's draft directives on employment.

Mr. Howard: Steady progress is being made on certain aspects of the European Commission's social action programme, particularly in the areas of health and safety, and free movement of workers. However, many member states continue to have major difficulties with the substance and proposed legal base of other proposals, notably in the area of employee rights.

Mr. Coombs: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there is a growing awareness among the Governments of the European Community member states that the implications of several of the draft directives, including those on working time and part-time work, need to be studied extremely carefully before any approval can be given? Does he think it strange that the only part of Europe where there appears to be a continuing willingness to sign up to anything and everything is the Opposition Front Bench?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right, but, of course, what he describes is entirely typical of the Labour party's blind attitude to such matters. It is significant that neither of the draft directives that my hon. Friend mentioned was even discussed at the last meeting of the Social Affairs Council.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Secretary of State confirm that no EC directive on employment contains a clause that would allow the sacking of a nurse or doctor who spoke up for a patient rather than in support of management cuts? Will he now take the opportunity to condemn the sacking of Graham Pink, a nurse who spoke out for patient care rather than for cuts in hospital services?

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that I am not familiar with the facts and circumstances of that particular case. It is only a person as irresponsible as someone sitting on the Labour Benches who would expect anyone to comment on the circumstances of a particular case without having full knowledge of them. It was a Conservative Government who first introduced the right for workers to take a complaint for unfair dismissal to an industrial tribunal, so we shall not take any lectures from the Labour party on that matter either.

Mr. Bevan: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the social action programme could threaten 100,000 jobs in this country?

Mr. Howard: I fear that my hon. Friend's estimate is a considerable underestimate. The damage that the social action programme would do to employment would be much graver than my hon. Friend suggests, but, of course, that matter is regarded as of no consequence by the employment vandals on the Labour Benches.

EC Unemployment

7. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average rate of unemployment in the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Using the latest available internationally comparable unemployment rates, the average rate of unemployment in the European Community was 8·7 per cent. in May 1991.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the only large European Community countries that have a statutory national minimum wage, which the Labour party seems to want, are France and Spain, which both have higher unemployment than us?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is part of the evidence of the job destruction effects of a minimum wage policy. The only people who doubt those effects are Opposition spokesmen, who display an attitude of blithe unconcern about the obvious consequence of the policy that they are following. Unemployment in Britain is below the EC average.

Mr. James Lamond: Is not it remarkable that after 12 years of Tory Administration the economy of this great prosperous industrial nation is so fragile that, on the Government's admission, it cannot sustain the basic human right of a minimum wage?

Mr. Jackson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. Perhaps he might like to reflect on the implications of a 15·4 per cent. unemployment rate in Spain.

Mr. Butterfill: As my hon. Friend is responsible for tourism, does he agree that a minimum wage, such as in Spain, would profoundly damage the tourism industry? Could not it lead to the unemployment and empty hotels that are evident throughout Benidorm?

Mr. Jackson: The connection between minimum wages and the loss of employment opportunities is palpable, obvious and has been demonstrated. Opposition Members should recognise that.

Mr. Beith: Is the Minister trying to contend that unemployment in Britain is not high and rising? As the

recession is likely to last longer than the Government predicted, is he now prepared to put some weight behind measures designed to ensure that people get work by seeing that more effort is made to rebuild schools and hospitals and to insulate homes?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the employment action programme that was announced a couple of weeks ago by my right hon. and learned Friend and which will provide such opportunities. Unemployment in Britain is below the European Community average. It is rising higher because we are at a different stage in the economic cycle, but last month's unemployment increase was the lowest since January, which gives some reason for hope.

Dock Labour Scheme

8. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received about the effect of the end of the dock labour scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: None, Sir. The complete absence of such representations is further proof that the fears of damage to the economy, increasing industrial problems and general dislocation in ports that were expressed vociferously by the Opposition during the passage of the Dock Work Act 1989 were without substance or foundation.

Mr. Nicholls: May I commend to my hon. Friend a paper produced for Aims of Industry entitled "The End of the Dock Labour Scheme—An Interim Appraisal", which contains clear and irrefutable evidence that the abolition of the scheme has been of much benefit to workers in the ports industry and to the nation as a whole? Does not my hon. Friend find it bizarre that, in the face of that compelling evidence, the Labour party refuses to deny that if it took office it would reintroduce the scheme?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend, whose knowledge of the matter is great, is absolutely right. The publication to which he refers shows that new life has been breathed into several ports since the disappearance of the dock labour scheme. Many areas, communities and people can look forward to a happier future thanks to the measures that were introduced so courageously by, among others, my hon. Friend. It is remarkable that no Labour Members —official spokesmen or otherwise—have sought to distance themselves from the deplorable dock labour scheme, which cost so many jobs. I invite them to do so today.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is not there something wrong with the Minister's records? To my knowledge, dockers in Leith have protested strongly about the ending of the dock labour scheme, which benefited employers and employees. What has gone wrong with the information that the hon. Gentleman collates? Not only Leith dockers but the labour movement are complaining about the ending of the dock labour scheme. Its restoration may not be official Labour policy, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that one person in particular—me—will argue for that restoration to be included in the Labour party manifesto.

Mr. Forth: I am delighted that a Labour Member has now said unequivocally that he at least wants a return to the old scheme. If Leith has a certain reputation in the House for eccentricity, that is perhaps understandable, but there are few who would agree with the hon. Gentleman, because all the evidence, from Hull, Liverpool and nearly all the great ports of the country, is that since the abolition of the scheme, with the willing support of dock workers, we have witnessed a revival of activity in the ports, which are offering a new level of service and efficiency and are bringing customers back. I hope that any of the hon. Gentleman's constituents who take the view that he described will think again and if they look positively at the opportunities facing Leith and them, they will see a revival of their opportunities.

Minimum Wage

9. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the cost and effect on unemployment of introducing a minimum wage; and if he is reconsidering his policy on this matter.

Mr. Howard: A national legal minimum wage set at two thirds of median male hourly rate, as proposed by the Labour party, could cost up to 2 million jobs—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—if higher-paid workers were successful in fully restoring pay differentials. That policy makes economic nonsense. My policy is to continue to point out at every opportunity the devastating consequences—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wrong."]—which that minimum wage proposal would bring about.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. No doubt the country will be shocked by the information contained in it. Has he any useful advice about the minimum wage to offer to the Leader of the Opposition, who will tomorrow be addressing the conference of the Transport and General Workers Union?

Mr. Howard: It was interesting to see the extent to which Labour Members were keen to disavow what is official Labour party policy and is stated in clear words in all Labour's policy documents. Perhaps it is not too late for the Leader of the Opposition to realise the absurdity of his policy and to abandon it when he talks tomorrow to the Transport and General Workers Union.

Mr. John Evans: Does the Secretary of State appreciate how distasteful it is to listen to Conservative Members, most of whom have outside jobs which more than double their parliamentary salaries, continually seeking to block any improvement in the wages and conditions of millions of British workers who suffer some of the lowest wages in the European Community?

Mr. Howard: That kind of sneer will not help to resolve the issue of how we can best improve wages and conditions. We can best help to do that by paying family credit to those on low pay, rather than substituting for low pay no pay, which is the policy of the Labour party.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of experience in the United States, which introduced a minimum wage law in 1947, since when unemployment among the ethnic minorities and especially black unskilled people has continued to rise, so much so that many American states have abandoned the minimum wage law and introduced a right to work law?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Every independent study has demonstrated that the policy would

cost jobs. The only point on which they disagree is how many jobs would be lost. When will the Labour party see sense and abandon its absurd policy?

Mr. Blair: When will Conservative Members admit that they are talking nonsense about Labour's policy? They have doubled unemployment and are now presiding over the fastest rise in unemployment in Europe—*[Interruption.]*—and do not know what to do about it. The most interesting point about the Major Government is that while they pour scorn on, and deride the notion of, protection for some of the poorest paid in our society—often women, many of them working in conditions of great hardship for £3·40 an hour—they will not lift a finger when the chairmen of privatised industries pay themselves an extra £80,000 or £90,000 a year. That is the true face of Majorism.

Mr. Howard: The simple answer is that we protect those on low pay through family credit. The Opposition would simply destroy their jobs.

Industrial and Vocational Training

10. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress with industrial and vocational training.

Mr. Howard: Progress has been substantial. Employers have been put in the lead of training locally and at industry level and are more committed than ever to raising the levels of skills in the work force. Employer training has increased by 85 per cent. over the past six years. Major reforms of education and youth training are raising the attainment of young people. Good progress is being made on the reform of vocational qualifications.

Mr. Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the evidence from the latest survey carried out by the Confederation of British Industry is that private industry is maintaining its commitment to training? In view of the representations made to me by Somerset training and enterprise council which I have communicated to him, will he confirm that the Government will maintain their commitment to provide the resources necessary to deliver the youth training guarantee?

Mr. Howard: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that confirmation. We shall continue to work in partnership with the training and enterprise councils to provide training of ever-higher quality.

Mr. Blair: When we are receiving reports from around the country that youth training and employment training have waiting lists because so many people are trying to get on them, when, even after last month's announcement, funds for training are being cut—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question!"]—and when the Department of Employment's review—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question!"]——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will ask a question. That would help.

Mr. Blair: When the Department's own review says that the relationship between TECs and the Government cannot be sustained as a result of funding cuts, why does not the Secretary of State take responsibility for the crisis in training which the Government have caused and about which they are doing nothing?

Mr. Howard: What the hon. Gentleman should be considering is yesterday's vote by his trade union—the Transport and General Workers Union—to boycott youth training, employment training and the training and enterprise councils. In view of his utter failure to dissuade even his own trade union from boycotting and turning its back on training, will the hon. Gentleman and the Leader of the Opposition, both of whom are sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, today undertake not to accept a penny more of tainted money from that union until it abandons its boycott of training?

Mr. Paice: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the latest CBI survey shows that three quarters of firms expect to maintain or increase their investment in training? How does that compare with the proposals for a tax on employment to pay for training—would not that cost more jobs and is not it typical of all the policies of that lot on the Opposition Benches?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is still the knee-jerk reaction of the Opposition to pull for compulsion at every turn. Their policies on this issue would be as disastrous as the training levy boards of the past.

Training Opportunities

11. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about training opportunities for *(a)* those with special needs and *(b)* women returnees.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils are required to set out in their business plans how they intend to offer suitable training to people with special needs and those returning to the labour market. Those plans form the basis of their contract with my Department and a substantial proportion of the £1·7 billion spent through TECs on employment training and youth training go to people with special needs and to women returners.

In addition, we have the £35 million of resources for ET targeted at those with special needs which was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the other day.

Mr. Hain: Does the Minister accept that the gap between what the Government say in the House about training and what is happening throughout the country is incredible? In west Wales, for example, the number of training weeks has been cut by 43,000, or 21 per cent., including 38 places for special needs trainees. The number of courses for part-time training has been chopped all over Neath, depriving particularly women returnees of much-needed opportunities. Those women cannot take up full-time courses because of child care responsibilities. Is not it time the Government admitted that their training programme is an absolute disgrace and a shambles?

Mr. Jackson: We need no lectures from the Labour party. We are spending two and a half times as much in real terms on training, vocational education and enterprise as was spent when the Labour party was last in office.

Every time Labour Members make a statement about these matters, their expenditure commitments are qualified by references to "resources allowing".

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Griffiths: The Prime Minister must be aware of the 253 per cent. pay increase of the chief executive of Yorkshire Electricity—yet another in a long line of outrageous pay increases to the chiefs of former publicly owned industries. Is not it true that the right hon. Gentleman refuses to do anything about those pay rises because of his friends and former colleagues on the boards of those companies, who are stuffing their pockets with money as fast as it can be snatched from the long-suffering consumer?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman gives a prize example of Labour humbug. The Labour party's policy document "Opportunity Britain" states:

"British industry now needs a long term commitment from Government . . . but not in the form of second guessing industry".

The hon. Gentleman should remember that.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: May I remind my right hon. Friend that, so far this year, his Government have supported the creation of 4,500 new jobs in Wales and nearly £352 million of investment for the Principality? Every announcement of such good news has been greeted contemptuously by Labour Members. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the tactics of the luddite left are the surest, fastest way of undermining investor confidence?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has just returned from the United States with a significant package of job-creating projects, promising more than 500 new jobs. I should have thought that the Opposition would welcome that.

Mr. Kinnock: When the Prime Minister meets the Heads of Government of the G7 major industrialised nations next week, will he explain to them how he managed to get an oil-rich country like Britain to the bottom of the employment, growth and investment leagues?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should look at what has happened over the past 10 years, when our growth has far outstripped that of almost every other industrial nation. Over the decade as a whole, we have one of the best job creation records of any nation.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister chooses to speak of the past. Will he therefore recognise that, for the past three years, we have been at the bottom of those employment, growth and investment leagues and that, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with his policies we will be in that position again next year? Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that this is the first time that any country has been at the bottom for four consecutive years? As the right hon. Gentleman has been a Treasury Minister or the Prime Minister over the whole period, does he agree that he should accept unique responsibility for this unique failure?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should have read on in the OECD report, where it was made clear that lower inflation is the essential condition for sustained growth. Everybody recognises that except the right hon. Gentleman. Indeed, only last week at the National Economic Development Council, trade unionists such as Mr. Jordan, Mr. Edmonds and Mr. Willis all supported the steps to reduce inflation. Only the right hon. Gentleman does not know where prosperity begins.

Mr. Kinnock: By pushing the economy into deep recession, the Prime Minister can, of course, reduce inflation. Does he think that, under his policies, he will be higher placed on the growth, employment and investment leagues next year? Does he recognise that, if he is not, he is just laying the seeds for further inflation?

The Prime Minister: We are absolutely refusing to take action now that may lay the seeds for future inflation. We are determined to ensure that we not only get inflation down but keep it down. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, we shall not take the easy option now at the risk of problems later.

Mr. Robert Banks: Has my right hon. Friend read the reports of the conference of the Transport and General Workers Union—the union which, incidentally, sponsors the Leader of the Opposition——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This must be related to the Government's responsibilities.

Mr. Banks: Has he read about its calls for the scrapping of all trade union laws, with the consequent return of Mr. Ron Todd's secondary strikes and flying pickets? Is not he thankful that in framing industrial laws, his party conferences have not been tainted by the block votes of the trade union ballots?

The Prime Minister: It is perfectly clear that Labour Members are sensitive about their relationship with the trade unions. They are right to be, because their idea of democracy is demonstrated every year when the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union visits the Labour party conference—one man, 1 million votes, and the right hon. Gentleman does as he is told.

Q2. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hoyle: When the Prime Minister takes time off from his engagements, will he do what the Home Secretary so conspicuously failed to do yesterday and accept total and unconditional responsibility for the appalling lapse in security that allowed two alleged terrorists to escape from Brixton gaol? Does not he realise what an enormous propaganda coup the Government have given the IRA?

The Prime Minister: Everyone shares the concern at the lapse in security yesterday which resulted in two prisoners escaping. That is a matter of genuine regret, not least by

my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Those problems have occurred before under previous Governments, but only this Government have taken action to tighten security, improve the conditions of prison staff and provide new and proper prison places.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree not only that a minimum wage would be damaging but that a minimum wage based on median wages would be the worst of all, because it would continue to ratchet upwards as the median moved upwards? That would lead to a catastrophic rise in wages, destruction of jobs and a policy that could have been dreamt up only by a shadow Cabinet controlled by 18 trade union-sponsored Members out of 20.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is now generally understood by everyone except those on the Opposition Front Bench that a minimum wage policy would devastate British industry and create a substantial amount of unemployment.

Q3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: As the Prime Minister says that he believes in the creation of a classless society, will he assure the House that he will not recommend the creation of any hereditary peerages?

The Prime Minister: The subject of honours is not a matter that I am required to answer in front of the House and I do not propose to do so.

Q4. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hannam: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the admission by Iraq that it has been developing a nuclear weapon? Does he agree that any responsible political party in this country should give a firm pledge not to give up nuclear weapons as long as other countries still have them and countries such as Iraq are developing them?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend and can certainly give him the assurance that he seeks. Iraq has now admitted to having a secret uranium enrichment programme. That is a clear violation of the nuclear safeguards agreement and of Iraq's non-proliferation treaty obligations. As I said some time ago at the Scottish conference in Perth, we shall ensure by whatever means it takes that Iraq can never again build up a capacity to threaten its neighbours with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.

Mr. Ashdown: Leaving aside for a moment the question of how the Bank of Credit and Commerce International got into its present position, will the Prime Minister assure the House that he personally understands the scale of the tragedy that is befalling BCCI investors? Is he aware that in some communities in Britain, up to 30 per cent. of traders are account holders in BCCI? Will he look at the rules governing compensation, which many regard as incapable of meeting the needs of those innocent people whose livelihoods are being destroyed?

The Prime Minister: I do, of course, understand the depth of tragedy that the apparent collapse of BCCI may mean. As yet, we are not sure what the outcome of the Serious Fraud Office investigation, the Bank of England investigation or other matters will be. The deposit protection fund was explicitly set up to protect small depositors, particularly those people with whom the right hon. Gentleman is most concerned, and it will apply in these circumstances.

Q5. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Has my right hon. Friend had time to read the private Member's Bill that would give the National Audit Office power to cost Opposition policies? If the Bill becomes law, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the National Audit Office will be given sufficient staff to carry out that important task because it is a big job —commitments are added week by week and speech by speech by Labour spokesmen—or is it a task which would be beyond anybody?

The Prime Minister: I welcome my hon. Friend's tongue-in-cheek suggestion, but I fear that he suggests a little too much. Only last Friday, the Labour party explained that its regional assemblies would be funded by block grant from Westminster. As usual, no price tag was attached and we may yet have to determine what that price tag is. As many hon. Members may have seen on "Panorama" last night, a member of the Labour party, Professor Rowthorne, summed up the matter adequately. Asked about Labour's spending plans, he said:

> "Frankly I think they don't add up. If you take their whole list of spending plans and say where's the money for this going to come from I think the answer is—I have no idea."

We have a very good idea—from the taxpayer's pocket.

Mr. John P. Smith: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to reassure the people of Wales by condemning the ludicrous suggestion that the Royal Welch Fusiliers could ever be merged with the Cheshire regiment, or that the oldest and one of the finest regiments in Wales could ever be disbanded?

The Prime Minister: We have very great concern for the regimental structure, which is more than the Opposition have shown during the past few years. Final decisions on "Options for Change" will take account of all relevant factors. Those decisions have not yet been made. When they are, my right hon. Friend and I shall be here to answer for them.

Q6. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Riddick: When my right hon. Friend met the leaders of the trade unions yesterday, did he feel that his position was significantly enhanced by the fact that those same trade unions do not wield 90 per cent. of the votes at

his party's conference and do not provide 70 per cent. of the funding for his party and that 18 of his Cabinet Ministers are not sponsored by trade unions?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree that that gives me a degree of freedom not open to everyone else. There is no doubt that Conservative employment laws have brought about a record on industrial relations which is currently the envy of the whole of Europe. We had fewer strikes last year than at any time since the war. In contrast, Labour's strikers' charter gives the unions exactly what they want and no one can doubt their ambitions. As Ron Todd said—I shall read this slowly so that hon. Members can listen:

"We do not want to go back to 1979—things weren't that good even then."

Q7. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winnick: As hostilities are being renewed, with accusations and counter-accusations by former Cabinet Ministers, is there any truth in the rumour floating round Westminster that a small EC peace-keeping mission is to come over here to try to restore some peace in the Prime Minister's party?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:
Peter Kilfoyle, Esq., for Liverpool, Walton.

BILL PRESENTED

Restoration of the Franchise

Mr. Harry Barnes, supported by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Ken Livingstone and Mr. Eddie Loyden, presented a Bill to remove impediments to electoral registration; and to limit the uses which may be made of electoral registers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July and to be printed. [Bill 212.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the 10 questions on the motions relating to Statutory Instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

Patent Office

That the draft Patent Office Trading Fund Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Dental Auxiliaries

That the draft Dentists Act 1984 (Dental Auxiliaries) Amendment Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Dental Auxiliaries (Amendment) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Statistics (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Statistics (Confidentiality) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

GMOs (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Genetically Modified Organisms (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Representation of the People (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Variation of Specified Documents and Amendment) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

European Elections (Northern Ireland)

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Local Elections (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Forth Ports Authority

That the draft Forth Ports Authority (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd.

That the draft Caledonian MacBrayne Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Points of Order

3.33 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is serious. I am concerned about the safety and well-being of two of our colleagues in the House. As the new hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) was being presented here in the House of Commons for the first time, I noticed that the hon. Members for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) were not in the Chamber. Should we send out a search party?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is very full, so I cannot see everyone.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any request for a statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment about the fact that the Bank of Credit and Commerce International is on the current DOE list of recommendations for local authorities to put their money into? A number of local authorities are now deeply in debt because of the freezing of the accounts. Is the Secretary of State for the Environment prepared to come to the House and make a statement to outline arrangements for compensating local authorities that are in debt as a result of the Department's incompetence?

Mr. Speaker: I have not had any further requests for a statement, but we had one yesterday and I cannot recollect that question being asked.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any notification that the Secretary of State for Transport intends to make a statement? I received a press release yesterday which confirms that a further 15 new or extended bypasses are to be built and that three scheme identification studies are to be carried out, at a total value of £85 million—a significant figure. I should have thought that many hon. Members on both sides of the House would want the opportunity to congratulate the Department on that announcement and to establish any further details about the plans that they may seek on behalf of their constituents. Does this good news have a chance of being aired in a statement?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no request for a statement about that, but I was present for a long Adjournment debate on this very matter, and I thought that I heard the hon. Gentleman raise the subject.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, when the Economic Secretary gave us a report on BCCI yesterday, he said that he might have to return to the subject. Will you therefore agree that we need a statement from the Department of the Environment which, on 28 June, told York city council, "You can borrow money from BCCI"? It is a question of who will be surcharged: the local authority, or, more properly, the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Speaker: It is certainly not a matter for me.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw attention to a letter from the Department of the Environment to Allerdale council advising it to borrow from this company? Following that advice by a Government Department, recieved by Allerdale on 28 June, Allerdale district council borrowed £1 million from the bank last week. The advice came in the form of a list of banks approved by the Bank of England. Surely we should have another statement to Parliament setting out the truth of the position and the fact that local authorities have been grossly misled.

Mr. Speaker: That may well be, but this is not a matter for me. What the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard by those responsible for making these statements.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you ask the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) to explain what the problem is if a local authority borrowed money from the bank and has got the cash?

Mr. Speaker: That is patently not a matter for me; these are matters for debate across the Chamber——

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: This will be the last one.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that what my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said should be heard by those who are present. Would it not be courteous if, for a matter of this importance, either the Government Chief Whip or the Leader of the House were present? By what mechanism may we ask questions on this vital subject, which concerns local authorities and many families who see their futures going up in smoke? By what mechanism do the Government propose to make a response, given the inadequate answers of yesterday?

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is the whole problem about points of order of this kind—they are addressed to me. They should not be matters for the Leader of the House——

Mr. Dalyell: Where is the Leader of the House?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is in effect not raising points of order with me—he is raising them with the Leader of the House. I repeat that although they are not matters for me they were heard by the Leader of the House, who is present. Nothing else arises out of that.

Mr. Dalyell: The right hon. Gentleman should not be skulking where we cannot see him.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I correct the record? When I said "borrow", I meant "invest in".

Companies (Subsidiaries in Liquidation)

3.39 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make a holding company responsible for certain debts of its wholly-owned subsidiary in liquidation; and to make other provision for such circumstances.

The Bill is aimed at preventing holding companies from retaining factories, machinery, and assets while putting wholly owned subsidiaries with no assets into liquidation, and passing the costs of redundancy payments, holiday pay, national insurance, PAYE, income tax and VAT to the taxpayer.

The Bill will achieve that by transferring statutory debts to the holding company when a wholly owned subsidiary is put into liquidation. It will defeat the practice of creating subsidiaries to avoid statutory debts, and will deal with the problem of what are known as phoenix companies—which effectively rise from the ashes of a liquidated company.

The impact of that practice is best illustrated by a recent example from my own constituency, in Skelmersdale, involving a company named Coppernob Group Holdings plc, which recently made 510 north-west workers redundant.

Before I continue, I want to show the House the most recent fax that I received from that company's solicitors, in which they attempt to prevent me from——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That kind of visual aid should not be used. I ask the hon. Member to make his case orally.

Mr. Hind: This fax contains a threat——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not necessary to have such a document shown on television. I repeat, the hon. Member should make his case orally.

Mr. Hind: I was trying to make the point that, in introducing my Bill, I have been subjected, in performing my duties as a Member of Parliament, with threats of being sued and of injunctions. That has been done in an attempt to prevent me from carrying out my duties as the Member of Parliament representing Skelmersdale. That was my purpose in showing the fax to the House. It arrived at half-past four yesterday afternoon.

The Coppernob group of companies consists of Coppernob Group Holdings plc, which has two shareholders. The major shareholder and chairman is an American, Mr. G. I. Fields—"Just call me Giffy" to his friends, but now known in Skelmersdale as "Mr. Sleaze" —and Mr. Ashok Shah. The holding company owns exclusively—with the exception of one share held by Mr. Fields—a number of subsidiary companies.

In 1989, a company named Response, which manufactured textiles, predominantly for Marks and Spencer, and owned four factories in north-west England, went into receivership. In March 1990, Coppernob Group Holdings purchased three of the factories—those at Wigan, Warrington and Skelmersdale—their machinery, and other assets from the receiver, and set up a shell company named Coppernob Manufacturing Ltd. That wholly owned subsidiary bought what Mr. Fields calls "the business"—the company's work force, order book, and good will, but no assets. The company could only run with an overdraft guaranteed by the holding company.

That division of assets from the work force was clearly set up to avoid damaging the holding company if the subsidiary failed and to evade statutory obligations to the work force. That is a perfectly legal but extremely sharp and dubious way of doing business.

After 10 months of trading, on 11 January 1991, Coppernob Manufacturing Ltd. failed, losing more than £750,000 to Coppernob and over £500,000 to the taxpayer.

The Wigan work force of 180 were made redundant, but, as Coppernob Manufacturing Ltd was a subsidiary having no assets, its work force were sent down the road to the Department of Employment to receive redundancy payments, which were less than their statutory entitlement. That cost the taxpayer £552,812 in lost PAYE, income tax, national insurance contributions, and value added tax.

We then saw the rising of the phoenix company. In a deal between the liquidator of Coppernob Manufacturing Ltd. and Mr. Fields, the business in the remaining two factories in Warrington and Skelmersdale, employing 330 workers, was transferred to an existing Coppernob shell company having a turnover of £25,000, known as Team Spirit Ltd.—and not to the holding company. That transfer was made at a cost of £20,000, plus stock.

Team Spirit Ltd. failed four months later, on 3 May, and 330 workers were made redundant. Again, Team Spirit made no contribution to their redundancy payments, as the company had no assets. Some £252,000 was lost by Coppernob Holdings Ltd., but £1·2 million by the taxpayer. This left the unacceptable situation that, after two liquidations of subsidiaries, the holding company still held £1·75 million-worth of assets, but 510 employees had no jobs, no redundancy payments and in some cases no unemployment benefit because there had been a failure to meet the full national insurance contributions. Even Barnardo's and the local hospice lost money from the payroll giving scheme.

The work force then suffered the indignity of a double-page spread in the *Daily Mirror* on "top fashion house" Coppernob Ltd., two weeks later, followed by a two-thirds-page competition sponsored by the company. The work force would like to have won a prize in that competition, but all they wanted was the contractual redundancy payments that the operation of this company had denied them.

The loss to the taxpayer from these two phoenix shell companies is approximately £1·75 million, which could have been spent on schools, hospitals, pensions and social services. Instead, it is propping up the shady operations of Mr. Fields and his associates. The uncaring, cavalier attitude of Mr. Fields and Mr. Shah, who are really asset-strippers with the commercial standards of the gutter, is to be deplored.

The Conservative party has often been accused of association with this sort of thing, but Mr. Fields is not a Conservative. He spent most of his time in the factory telling the work force that he was a member of the Labour party and a friend of the Leader of the Opposition. No doubt the Leader of the Opposition will join me in condemning this shady behaviour. Mr. Fields's concern for his fellow man ended every time that he reached for his wallet. I see no reason why the law should allow doubtful business men like Mr. Fields an opportunity to exploit a loophole in the law at the expense of the public and the work force. The Bill will sort out a part of the law in which there is lack of clarity—that on the transfers of undertakings.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Kenneth Hind, Mr. Chris Butler, Mr. Den Dover, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Charles Wardle, Mr. Roger King, Mr. John Bowis, Sir John Wheeler, Mr. Brando-Bravo, Mr. Barry Field, and Mr. William Powell.

COMPANIES (SUBSIDIARIES IN LIQUIDATION):

Mr. Kenneth Hind accordingly presented a Bill to make a holding company responsible for certain debts of its wholly-owned subsidiary in liquidation; and to make other provision for such circumstances:

And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 28 October and to be printed. [Bill 213.]

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have just heard my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) give a long catalogue of apparently disgraceful events. He said—you rightly brought him to order on it, Mr. Speaker—that he had received a threatening letter. What redress does he have if this turns out to be contempt?

Mr. Speaker: If an hon. Member alleges that there has been contempt, he should address a letter to me on the matter, and I shall look into it most carefully.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is an important point, and I apologise for interrupting the proceedings. Is it not the case that, once an hon. Member uses a communication that he has received and that may be the basis of a contempt complaint, he cannot then raise a complaint of contempt with you or with the Select Committee set up to consider that? My understanding—I could easily be wrong, having been wrong so many times before—is that one is not allowed to raise such a matter on the Floor of the House if a complaint is to be made, and if an hon. Member feels that privilege has been breached, he should take that point up immediately, without raising the substance of the complaint on the Floor of the House. As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman has now raised the substance.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is right. If contempt is alleged, the hon. Gentleman involved should raise the matter with the Chair at the first opportunity. The Chair will then decide whether the contempt should go to the Committee of Privileges. The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) did not take that action, and presumably he will not do so now that it has been raised on the Floor of the House.

Opposition Day

[17TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Low Incomes

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. In view of the late start to the debate, I ask hon. Members to make brief speeches.

3.49 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the huge rise in income inequality; and calls on the Government to combat poverty and its effects on health, diet, educational achievement and individual opportunity.

We are debating the growth of poverty and low incomes in our society. There could be no clearer sign of how rattled the Government are on those matters than that the Secretary of State with chief responsibility for the issue has been removed from delivering the main reply and been confined to a mere 10-minute winding-up speech. That speaks volumes for the Government's defensive attitude on the matter. Given their record, they are absolutely right to be defensive.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): It is no more remarkable that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and I should have chosen to conduct this debate together than it was for the hon. Gentleman yesterday, as the Opposition's social security spokesman, to make his main speech on the minimum wage, which is precisely what brings my right hon. and learned Friend to this debate. Any attempt to debate the problem of low incomes while ignoring the issue of the national minimum wage shows how rattled the hon. Gentleman is.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman should get his facts right. I did not make a speech yesterday on the national minimum wage. I commented on the effects of the national minimum wage in terms of social security cost to the taxpayer. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman picked it up, because I shall return to that. The right hon. Gentleman knows a thing or two about low pay. He has spent his time in office doing his best to spread it in every way possible. Low pay is a very small part of the wider issue of low incomes, which is the real issue of the debate. The inescapable conclusion is that the Government are so ashamed of their record that they are doing everything possible to avoid talking about it.

The only aspect of a now almost totally discredited economic record, from which the Government still try to rescue some credit, is that living standards, they claim, have risen for all, including those on the lowest incomes. That is certainly not the impression of anyone who sees beggars for the first time in living memory on the London underground and on the streets of our major cities. It is not the impression of those who work in the voluntary organisations dealing with the homeless or of social workers or those who work in benefit offices and come into contact with the casualties of Government policy. It is certainly not the impression of those on the lowest incomes, but the Government continue to chant it.

[Mr. Meacher]

The Government say that everybody has gained, that trickle-down is working and that poverty either does not exist or cannot be measured, and that, even if it could, it is not a serious problem. As I shall show, each of those claims is false. In support of their claim that everyone has become better off under them, the Government's favourite fact is that, between 1979 and 1987, the bottom tenth of the population had an income increase in real terms of 0·1 per cent. That is a figure taken from a Government document entitled "Households Below Average Incomes", and it is repeated in an answer which I received a week ago.

Never mind that that figure and others associated with it are four years old and that, if they included last year or this year, they would present a very different picture: let that pass. The Secretary of State is only too happy to accept that the figure to which I have referred shows an increase, and I would not wish to disabuse him of his self-satisfaction. For the rest of us, however, what do the figures mean?

The increase works out at a prince's ransom of an extra 3p per person per week. In other words, after eight years of Tory government, the poorest tenth of our population are, I suppose, an Oxo cube or a book of matches better off. I wonder how many Oxo cubes or books of matches Iain Vallance could buy after his recent pay increase of over £3,100 a week, or Tiny Rowland with his extra £4,100 a week.

I submit that the mark of a civilised society is that it looks after its weakest members and that there is something obscene about a Government who encourage such huge differentials. Unfortunately for the Government, the evidence in their document does not bear out the case that everyone has gained. Indeed, it reveals the opposite.

If the median or middle member of the poorest tenth made only a minuscule gain of 3p a week, that shows that the half of the group poorer than him—that is nearly 3 million people—overwhelmingly made losses. Their standard of living declined, in some instances by substantial amounts. That is borne out by the first report of the Select Committee on Social Security entitled "Low Income Statistics: Households Below Average Income Tables 1988" which was published a couple of months ago. It shows that a fifth of the unemployed were 7 per cent. worse off in real terms, a fifth of younger single adults and couples were 6 per cent. worse off and a fifth of those in rented households were also worse off.

That is confirmed by another piece of conclusive evidence in the Select Committee's report that the Government have tried to play down. On page LXXV of the report, it is stated that the average income, as opposed to the median income, of the poorest tenth of the Torydpopulation, fell under the Government between 1979 and 1988 by 6.2 per cent. I am perfectly well aware that the Select Committee, which is Tory-dominated, states that the

"arithmetic mean could prove a misleading indicator . . . because a small number of extreme and unrepresentative values could bias the average figure for the whole group."

I have news for both the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Social Security, who I suspect will rely on that statement. Means and averages always work as the Select Committee describes, and they are invariably accepted as accurate indicators of trends—except, apparently, when a Tory-dominated Select Committee finds that the facts are unpalatable.

If the evidence shows—it clearly does—major falls in living standards for the 2 million or more on the lowest incomes, why should that be written off as extreme or unrepresentative rather than the truth? To suggest otherwise is surely to fly in the fact of common sense, when everywhere around us we can see evidence of the new poverty.

We see people sleeping in cardboard boxes. There are people begging in the streets. There is a huge increase in bed-and-breakfast homelessness. There are lone parents with young children who are short of food. There is the growth of low-paid, low-skilled and insecure jobs. There are youngsters who never obtained a proper job. There are middle-aged or older men with obsolete skills whose factories or pits have been closed down.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I appreciate the opportunity to advise my hon. Friend of further figures that have been released recently. In the Yorkshire water authority, cut-offs have more than doubled during the past year since privatisation, because people on low incomes cannot afford to pay the massive charges imposed by that authority. At the same time, the chairman of the Yorkshire water authority has had a salary increase of 250 per cent.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes a good point. That is another clear indicator of the growth of poverty. We must consider not only the rise in water charges of the newly privatised utilities, but the growth in low pay and the inability to pay the charges. I repeat that that is obscene when compared with the increases sometimes doubling the pay of those who are now the chief executives and chairmen of the water companies.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): If I may take the hon. Gentleman back to his earlier remarks about low pay, does he accept that family credit is a great help in topping up the earnings of those who receive it? Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell the House today his view of the future of family credit? Does he agree with his hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) who, in, I think, September 1989, said that he believed that family credit should wither on the vine?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman makes a pretty ill-advised point. First, family credit goes to only about one-third of a million, and the number of low-paid in our society is certainly well over 10 times that level; secondly, it has only a 50 per cent. take-up; and thirdly, it just exacerbates the poverty trap. Therefore, it is not sensible to promulgate family credit.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Does my hon. Friend agree that family credit amounts to a subsidy of the worst employers in the land and that we are handing out a state subsidy to employers who cannot pay a wage on which people can live? Is it not much better to have a national minimum wage so that such industries could be more efficient?

Mr. Meacher: As we well know, the Tories believe in low pay. That is why they refuse to prosecute those who underpay their workers. Family credit, about which they make so much, is little more than a bandage on the wound, and one that does not staunch it, either.

Mr. Burns *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way again. I want to make some progress.

What has been the Government's response to the evidence? One reaction was to declare that poverty did not exist any more. Regrettably, the survival of poverty turned out to be rather more firmly based than the survival of the previous Secretary of State for Health who espoused that view. The Government then promoted the idea that market forces would soon solve the problem, because wealth would soon trickle down from the top. In fact, it has been the unleashing of market forces in the Thatcherite decade which, so far from resolving the problem, has created it.

If I may return to the parliamentary answer that I was given a week ago, while the poorest tenth in the population had a rise—if we can elevate it to that title—using the Government's preferred formula of median income, of 0·1 per cent., the richest tenth had a rise of 40·3 per cent.—that is 400 times more. There is not much sign of trickle-down there.

Even leaving aside the poorest and the richest, the growth in inequality has still been enormous. According to the same parliamentary answer, the bottom third of the nation had an average rise in income between 1979 and 1987 of less than 2 per cent., while the top half of the nation had an average rise of 24 per cent.

The Government would like to argue—no doubt we shall hear it said today—that that is the result of merit or effort. If only it were. In fact, the pattern right across the spectrum has been consistent during the past decade that the weakest in society get least and the strongest get most. It is obvious to all but the most myopic observers that power and class are the determinants, not merit and effort.

Another parliamentary answer that I was given recently revealed that, in the 10 years from 1979, the lowest-paid tenth of manual workers received a 4 per cent. increase in real earnings, while the highest paid received a 17 per cent. increase. The lowest-paid section of non-manual employees also received 17 per cent., while the highest-paid received 46 per cent.

Far from there being a trickle down from the rich man's table, the nearer that the crumbs get to the floor, the thinner and fewer they become. According to the trickle-down theory, the more wealth there is at the top, the more reaches the bottom. Under the present Government, there seems to be a gummed-up filter; nothing is getting through.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Surely the comparison that most people will want to make is between this Government's performance and that of the last Labour Government. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, in the past 12 years, the take-home pay of a married man with two children, on half average earnings, has risen by 30 per cent., whereas, under the last Labour Government, it did not rise at all? Will he also confirm that today's social security budget is larger in real terms than ever before?

Mr. Meacher: The reason why the social security budget is so much higher today than under the last Labour Government is that the level of unemployment is now more than twice as high as it was then.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No; I want to make a little progress.

What makes the enrichment of the already rich so deplorable is the fact that the Government have created that enrichment at the expense of those who are on or near the poverty line. The cascade of tax reliefs showered on the better-off during the past decade was made possible by the savings—they now amount to more than £30 billion—from cumulative cuts in benefit. Breaking the link between pensions and earnings has saved more than £25 billion; the child benefit freeze saved a further £1 billion; and, each year, further cuts in benefits for the unemployed have saved another £1 billion. Lest there be any doubt among Conservative Members, let me emphasise that those figures are taken directly from a parliamentary answer.

That must rank as the biggest redistribution of income from the deprived to the affluent that we have seen this century.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Are not those figures—which compare the low-paid with other groups—essentially selective? I note that the hon. Gentleman did not cite any post-1987 figures; for example, he did not quote from the report of the Social Security Committee. Is that because he knows that the more recent figures would provide a much better comparison from the Government's point of view, and would not aid his case at all?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman really has put his foot in it. Our complaint is that the Government have deliberately concealed the most recent figures. Under the last Labour Government, we were given the figures relating to incomes—including the lowest incomes—within a year. Under the present Government, that became first two and then three years; now, the figures are four years out of date. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that, if we had the most recent figures, they would show that those on low incomes are considerably worse off than before.

The reason why all that matters is that it exposes the Prime Minister's rhetoric at last week's Tory women's conference—his talk of a Britain with opportunities open wide to all—as the meaningless bombast it was. I see that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) is leaving the Chamber. He has obviously gone to look for some better figures, but I do not think that he will be able to find any.

Can the Secretary of State for Employment tell us what opportunities are open to the 2·5 million unemployed when the Government, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman in particular, have made drastic cuts in the training and enterprise council's training funds, even though we have the worst trained work force in Europe? What are the opportunities for the 150,000 families designated as homeless last year when the Government pressurise those on low incomes into home ownership that they cannot afford and then pull the plug on them with crippling mortgage rates? What opportunities are there for the 15 million people who live on local authority housing estates, the condition of which the Prime Minister recently described as "an absolute disgrace", when his Government's policies have produced that disgrace by cutting the housing budget by a crashing 85 per cent.?

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I must make progress if other hon. Members are to have the opportunity to participate in the debate.

Low incomes matter because several research reports have recently demonstrated that they severely undermine the quality of life. Last month, a survey was published by the National Children's Home which found that one child in 10 had gone without food in the previous month because there was not enough money to buy that food. It revealed that one in five parents had gone hungry because they did not have enough money to buy food and that one in three had gone short of food to ensure that other members of the family had enough.

I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security is listening carefully, because that detailed nutritional survey found that no parent or child was eating a healthy diet. Contrary to the offensive and ignorant remarks that the Minister made—she seems to be following in the "Edwina Currie" tradition of blaming the poor—they had such a diet not because they did not know what constituted a healthy diet, but simply because they could not afford one.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way again.

Poverty is the cause not just of an inadequate diet, but ill health. Even the Secretary of State for Health now admits that, but he immediately made it clear that he would do absolutely nothing about it. He said that the divisions were so fundamental and long lasting and the issues so complex that they were not a suitable subject for a Government target. After the ravages of a decade of Tory Government, surely there could not be clearer evidence that the Tories had given up on poverty altogether than that contained in the quote.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of what my hon. Friend said about the junior Minister, does he agree that it is extremely obnoxious for a would-be Tory Member of Parliament to try to trivialise poverty by living on income support for a week? The real issue is the hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, of our fellow citizens who must live on income support for months and, in some cases, through no fault of their own, for years. Those people have no opportunity to go back to their two homes and substantial income after just a week.

Mr. Meacher: Lady Olga Maitland is well known as a Tory with a closed mind. She is proving nothing by living on income support for one week when, as my hon. Friend correctly says, people have to live on it for months and years without hope and in despair. I wonder how many right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches known the level of income support on which Lady Olga and others seek to live. I know that some Conservative Members have learnt the answer since I raised it before, but I wonder how many Tory Members realise that income support means living on £39 a week for a single person and £62 for a married couple. That is just about the amount that many Tories would spend on a modest meal in their clubs.

Mr. Riddick *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already asked hon. Members to bear in mind that this is a half-day debate and that a great many hon. Members want to participate. We must get on.

Mr. Meacher: I will not detain the House, but I want to draw attention to some other relevant information.

The recent research of Richard Wilkinson showed that, the greater the gap between rich and poor, the worse the overall standard of health and the lower society's life expectancy. That is not surprising, but it needs to be said. Other research by Mike Lake, Buckinghamshire's senior educational psychologist, showed a clear link between poverty and poor educational achievement.

That is why poverty matters, and why our indictment, using the EC's definition of the poverty line as 50 per cent. of average national income, is that the Government's policies have more than doubled the number of people who are forced to subsist on a standard of living that the EC regards as poverty. That is why poverty and low incomes are firmly back on the political agenda.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: One dog, one bite.

It is clear that the Government have no strategy, no intention and no desire to tackle the issue. In contrast, we will do so. We will raise pensions by £5 a week for a single pensioner and by £8 a week for a married couple, including for those on income support. We will restore the real value of child benefit to its 1987 level, after three years of Tory freeze. We will pay £9·55p a week, at today's values, for each child, including to recipients of income support. We will introduce a minimum wage to combat poverty, at a rate of——

Mr. Riddick *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House should get on. Many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate.

Mr. Meacher: We have made it clear that we will introduce——

Mr. Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman accused me of giving wrong information to the House. He should explain that he did not use the table in the Select Committee's report, which shows a figure of 9·5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman feels that he has been misunderstood, he should seek to raise that matter when he is called to speak later in the debate.

Mr. Meacher: We have made it clear that we will introduce a minimum wage to combat poverty pay, which is widespread, at a rate of about £3·40 an hour, which will benefit more than 4 million workers.

No wonder the Tories are so hostile to the idea, when, of 100,000 firms that have been caught underpaying their employees in the past decade, only 67 were prosecuted. That is why I say that the Tories believe in low pay. No wonder the Government are so hostile to the idea of fair wages, when the Secretary of State has assisted in cutting the numbers of the wages inspectorate to a mere 71. Each inspector is now supposed to inspect more than 5,500 workplaces, which is ridiculous.

No wonder the Tories are so partial to exploitative employers, when we see advertisements in the newspapers that say:

"Job would suit a person on family credit."

Social security payments and lost tax from low pay cost British taxpayers more than £1 billion a year. A recent EC report said that poverty is

"particularly high in the poorer countries of the EC—Portugal, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the UK."

What an indictment. The Government have certainly done their best to align our low pay to the lowest pay there, and I suppose that that is what the Tories mean by convergence.

But low pay is not only socially unjust. It is also socially and economically damaging. As another recently published EC report stated:

"Europe cannot hope to occupy a leading position at world level if it bases its competitiveness on low wages."

That is exactly the Government's strategy. Their record on low pay—on poverty pay—is one of complacency and complicity. Only a change of Government will restore the combination of economic competence and social justice that Britain desperately needs.

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its policies which have made possible real increases in expenditure on vital public services including social security, education and health; welcomes the recent recognition by the Social Security Select Committee that real incomes rose across the income scale between 1979 and 1988; and deplores the commitment of Her Majesty's Opposition to a National Minimum Wage which would destroy jobs, thereby reducing opportunities and living standards for up to two million people."

The speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) explained clearly why every member of the Cabinet is envious of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security having the hon. Gentleman as his shadow. I do not propose to follow the hon. Gentleman down the statistical byways along which he led the House; my right hon. Friend has exposed the fallacies in the hon. Gentleman's approach time and again and will do so yet again tonight.

I wish to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman. He is a man who believes in being loyal to his friends. For years he has been sponsored by the Confederation of Health Service Employees and his policies have always faithfully reflected that close relationship. As the Labour party's employment spokesman, he went round trade union conferences promising everything they wanted. As a result, he committed one blunder after another, leaving his successor in the soup. He told the Transport and General Workers Union that he would fight with it to stop the abolition of the national dock labour scheme—a step now universally recognised as a boon for the ports industry—and he hinted that Labour would restore the scheme. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has kept very quiet about that. The hon. Member for Oldham, West told the trade unions in November 1988:

"workers approve of the closed shop."

Less than a year later, his successor admitted that Labour would no longer openly oppose the abolition of the closed shop.

Worst of all, the hon. Gentleman bowed to the demands of the National Union of Public Employees and COHSE, and signed his party up to its commitment to a national statutory minimum wage. He was the employment spokesman in May 1989 when the commitment to a national statutory minimum wage was written into "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change," Labour's key policy document. He was the man who stuck that albatross around the necks of the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench, and I doubt whether they will ever forgive him for it.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): If this is old lags' corner, I am sure that I have seen the Secretary of State somewhere before. Indeed, I recall seeing a lot of him. I remember him as the Minister who was supportive in propagating every dot and comma of the poll tax legislation—*[Interruption.]*—and he did that more assiduously and with more devotion than any other Minister round him. Can a Minister who was so responsible in that respect and who thereby was intimately involved in wasting billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on that folly, now tell the great British public that we cannot afford to pay people £140 a week?

Mr. Howard: It was obvious from the moment the hon. Gentleman got to his feet that he would go to any lengths to divert discussion from the national minimum wage issue —*[Interruption.]*—but he will not succeed in that enterprise. We shall keep to the subject during the debate.

I return to the exquisite relationship between the hon. Members for Oldham, West and for Sedgefield. They are the Laurel and Hardy of the Labour party. Their conversations, which are increasingly frequent, always end with the refrain of the hon. Member for Sedgefield, "This is another fine mess you've got me into."

Last week the hon. Member for Oldham, West made an extraordinary speech in which he said that Labour would dismantle the links within the Employment Service between those who help people to find jobs and those who ensure that they receive the correct benefit. The implications of that are startling and far reaching. Does the hon. Gentleman mean to abolish the integrated offices which enable unemployed people to receive their benefit and search for work at the same place? Would he stop the new system, which I introduced, which ensures that unemployed people are seen by the same person whenever they come into one of the Employment Service's offices? Or does he intend merely to make it much easier for false claimants to rip off the taxpayer?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has been very clear in its advice. It said in its 1990 report, "Progress on Structural Reform", that future reforms should continue to include

"social transfer programmes which continue to tighten links between income support and participation in education and employment programmes"

and called for

"promoting and reorienting specific income transfer programmes towards linking eligibility increasingly to job search, education and retraining".

The hon. Gentleman's suggested changes would defy international advice, undermine the progress towards better quality and value for money in our services towards the unemployed, and benefit only the benefit fraudsters.

Ms. Short: The Secretary of State may not be aware that the Government have progressively used the income support system to force people who are unemployed into lower and lower-paid jobs. That is what we are against.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady is entirely wrong. This Government have made available a wider range of services to help unemployed people than any other Government have ever done.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West referred several times to unemployment. That is understandable. However, for some unaccountable reason he failed to mention that unemployment is also rising in France, the newly united Germany, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, the European Community as a whole, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, Australia and even in Japan. The hon. Gentleman has a touching faith in the powers available to a British Government, but surely even he cannot believe that unemployment is rising in all those countries because of our actions.

Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, it is now feasible to see that the fear of a slump on the scale of the 1930s led interest rates to be cut too far after the stock market crash of 1987. What was the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer saying at the time? It is not difficult for him to remember. It is not as if he has a wide repertory of comments on such matters. The right hon. and learned Gentleman calls for an immediate reduction in interest rates more often than the average parrot says "pieces of eight", and that was exactly what he was calling for in the autumn of 1987. It is clear beyond argument that, if the Opposition had been in office at that time inflation would have got higher, the measures needed to overcome it would have been more painful and the difficulties that we face today would be very much greater. That is a fact.

The hon. Gentleman also unaccountably failed to point out that every Labour Government since 1929 have doubled unemployment. That is a track record which Labour is still determined to match. It is still the case that Labour policies would sharply worsen unemployment, as I shall show in a moment.

Mr. Riddick *rose*——

Mr. Howard: Given the refusal of the hon. Member for Oldham, West to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), it is clear that I must give way.

Mr. Riddick: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for allowing me to make the point that I had hoped to make to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). Did my right hon. and learned Friend see the latest survey of pay trends by the Reward group, as reported last week in *The Times*? That group pointed out that a policy of a minimum national wage

"would force up costs more in the Midlands and the North"

and that that was

"likely to create further job losses in areas with the highest unemployment rates."

Did not the hon. Member for Oldham, West refuse to give way to me because he did not want me to point out that fact?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. The hon. Member for Oldham, West did not want to give way to him because the hon. Gentleman knows that my hon. Friend is the true spokesman for the north of England on these matters. My hon. Friend speaks for his constituents in the north of England and knows what devastating effect Labour party policies would have on that area.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West wholly fails to acknowledge that the link between low pay and low income is tenuous. According to the family expenditure survey for 1987—the latest year for which figures are available—only 8 per cent. of those in the bottom tenth of the earnings distribution are in the poorest tenth of the population. More than 50 per cent. are in the richer half and, indeed, 5 per cent. are in the richest tenth.

Unemployment is much more likely than a low-paid job to lead to low income. Only 15 per cent. of the poorest tenth of the population are in households headed by a full-time worker whereas more than twice as many are in households headed by someone who is unemployed. The conclusion is obvious: the way to help those on low incomes is to help them get and keep a job, not to destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs by introducing a national statutory minimum wage. One does not help people on low pay by giving them no pay.

I accept that people on low pay, particularly those with family responsibilities, may need help, and we provide that help on a more generous and extensive scale than ever before. In just the past three years, the Government have tripled spending in cash terms on family credit. Since 1979, spending on benefits for families dependent on low-paid work has increased by 10 times in real terms. Today the average family credit payment is more than £30 a week.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West is usually keen to promise increases in every benefit under the sun, but he has been more than usually coy about the one benefit that is specifically targeted to help families whose main breadwinner is in a low-paid job—family credit. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take this opportunity to enlighten the House. Does he plan, as the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, to let family credit wither on the vine? Will the hon. Member for Oldham, West now answer a straight question? Would a Labour Government continue to pay family credit? I am prepared to give way to him so that he can answer.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a fantasy point. Of course we will continue with family credit—we have never said that we will not—but it is far better to have a minimum wage to increase the take-home incomes of those in work. The right hon. and learned Gentleman accuses us in relation to benefits. Will he apologise to the House for the £30 billion cuts in benefit that the Government have made during the past 10 years?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Howard: I shall answer the question. At last, the hon. Member for Oldham, West has made clear his party's policies on family credit. I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's figure of £30 billion. Perhaps he will enlighten me. I was not aware that he had obtained the sanction of the shadow Chief Secretary to use the figure of £30 billion in relation to benefits that the Labour party would restore. Unless and until the hon. Gentleman gets the sanction of the shadow Chief Secretary to talk about such figures, his best course is to show a discriminating silence on these matters, rather than to toss figures about.

The Labour party is fond of praying in aid the OECD. However, even the hon. Gentleman must be aware that the OECD's latest annual report on France expressly says:

"in general it would be preferable for equity issues to be clearly separated from the functioning of the labour market and handled directly through the tax-transfer system".

That is precisely what we are doing. Indeed, we have taken the OECD's advice not only by introducing and increasing

family credit, but by sharply raising the income tax thresholds by 27 per cent. faster than inflation, taking 2 million low-paid people entirely out of direct tax.

We know from the Leader of the Opposition that the Labour party has no intention of reducing the tax burden and has no interest in taking people out of tax. Will the hon. Member for Oldham, West now confirm, therefore, that when the Leader of the Opposition stressed that the Labour party would put all the fruits of economic growth —if there are any—into public spending and none into tax cuts, he was committing the Labour party to a refusal to raise tax thresholds at any level faster than inflation? Will he admit that that means calling a halt to the process of taking millions of low-paid people out of income tax liability altogether?

Ms. Short: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: I have already given way to the hon. Lady once and it was not an enlightening experience for the House, so I am not inclined to do so again.

The Labour party's vendetta against the low paid does not stop there. Labour is wholly committed to the social charter and the social action programme. In its latest policy document it promises to accept and implement the whole lot the moment it gets into office. That would include the draft directive on part-time and temporary work. The hon. Member for Sedgefield nods enthusiastically—he has supported that draft directive time and again. Under the provisions of that directive—it is important that everyone understands this—liability to pay national insurance contributions would be triggered not as now, when someone's earnings exceed £52 a week, but as soon as someone worked for more than eight hours a week.

The result of that Labour party commitment is that 1,750,000 of the lowest-paid people—all earning less than £52 a week but working more than eight hours a week —would instantly and automatically become liable to pay national insurance. How does the hon. Member for Sedgefield expect that proposal to help the low-paid? Has he thought about it? Does he care? Perhaps he has at last got his own back and dropped the hon. Member for Oldham, West in it for a change.

The Labour party claims that its national statutory minimum wage would "benefit" over 4 million low-paid people. It would do nothing of the sort. Rather, it would wreck our economy, smash job prospects and, as always with the Labour party, the lowest paid would be the first to suffer.

My Department has estimated that the second stage of the Labour party's minimum wage policy could destroy up to 2 million jobs. The hon. Member for Sedgefield does not like it when I mention that figure, as well he might not.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that those of us who represent constituencies where unemployment has been relentlessly rising in the past few months feel insulted by what he is saying? Will he now deal with the problem of unemployment rising in Eccles, where there is no minimum wage? Will he explain to the House why it is rising? What does he intend to do about the 3 million children who are now living on or below the poverty line?

Mr. Howard: Does the hon. Lady seriously think that a word that she has uttered justifies the introduction of a policy that could destroy up to 2 million jobs? Does she expect the House to take that contention seriously? She should reflect on what she has said before blindly supporting a policy that would have such drastic consequences.

I have published the assumptions from which the figures of up to 2 million jobs has been calculated. I have invited the hon. Gentleman to publish his own figure of how many jobs would be destroyed by his policy, and the assumptions behind that. I have offered to have his estimates checked by my officials so that we can apply the same methodology to both. I am waiting for the hon. Gentleman to take advantage of that offer.

The hon. Gentleman claims that his policy would cost no jobs, but in a letter to *The Independent* he wrote:

"I have not accepted that the minimum wage would cost jobs . . . I have simply accepted that econometric models indicate a potential jobs impact".

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): Would the Secretary of State complete that quote to the end of the paragraph, please?

Mr. Howard: I am happy for the hon. Gentleman to read to the end of the paragraph if he wishes. I have given the House the essence of the quote. If he wishes to read the whole of the paragraph, including the weasel words that I have just uttered, I am happy to give way to him.

Mr. Blair: It just so happens that I have the rest of the paragraph with me. I go on to say:

"Although nothing remotely bears out Mr. Howard's claims, I rest my case on the empirical evidence of the impact of what has happened elsewhere, the balance of which is overwhelmingly positive."

That is what the Secretary of State missed out.

Mr. Howard: How the hon. Gentleman thinks that what he has said detracts in any way from the weasel words that I quoted earlier, which he could not bear to utter when I invited him to quote the whole paragraph, is absolutely beyond belief.

Mr. Burns: If the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is reluctant to take up the kind offer of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that Department of Employment statisticians could look into the matter, perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend should suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he should have a word with Mr. Bill Jordan, Mr. Eric Hammond and Mr. Bill Morris to find out exactly what figures they put on the number of job losses from the national minimum wage.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right, and I shall have a word to say about that aspect of the matter in a moment or two.

I remind the hon. Member for Sedgefield of what independent experts say about the consequences of the policy. Only last week, two new independent reports were added to the chorus of condemnation which the minimum wage meets everywhere. UBS Philips and Drew reported that the first stage of Labour's minimum wage would add 400,000 to the unemployment figures and a full point to inflation. It said that the second stage would increase unemployment by 1·25 million and push up inflation by 2·4 percentage points.

The Reward group, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) referred, when speaking on behalf of his constituents in the north of England, stressed that the minimum wage would have a devastating effect on the regions, and singled out the west

[Mr. Howard]

midlands as a district that would be desperately hard hit. That comes on top of the many other estimates of job losses that the minimum wage would cause. They range from those of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, which reckons that 166,000 jobs would be destroyed by stage one, to the university of Liverpool, which believes that 1·4 million jobs would be wiped out by stage two.

The Liverpool study also estimates that the second stage of the minimum wage would lower Britain's gross domestic product by 6·8 per cent. What is the hon. Gentleman's answer to that? What flights of rhetoric would he reserve to denounce that size of a downturn in our economy? How on earth does he think that that would help the low-paid?

Mr. Winnick: The Secretary of State referred to the west midlands and tried to justify his argument against a minimum wage by the loss of jobs. How can he pursue that argument when tens of thousands of jobs have already been lost in the west midlands and, unfortunately, are still being lost as a direct result of the Government's economic policies? The west midlands needs no lecture from the Secretary of State on the loss of jobs.

Mr. Howard: We can debate economic policies whenever the hon. Gentleman wishes to do so, but the question that he cannot escape is how his views on the Government's economic policy—whatever those views may be—justify the introduction by the Labour party, if it ever came to office, of a policy that would add up to 2 million people to the ranks of the unemployed. That is the question that the hon. Gentleman must face. He cannot shut his eyes to it and escape it.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Oldham, West published his extraordinary calculations about the effects of the introduction of a national statutory minimum wage. He claimed that such a policy would save the taxpayer £1·3 billion a year. If he really believes those figures, why is he being so modest? If the minimum wage will be such a boon, why limit it to a half and then to two thirds of average earnings? Why not set it at 75 per cent., 100 per cent. or 150 per cent. of average earnings and let the money roll in? The fact is that the hon. Gentleman's figures are entirely bogus and he knows it. I hope that he will make clear the basis of his calculations.

Mr. Butterfill: While my right hon. and learned Friend is referring to bogus figures, may I take him back to the statement made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on real income increases during the past 10 years? Is it not curious that the figure that he chose came from table D.2 of the Select Committee report, which is the figure after allowing for housing costs, rather than from table A.2, which is the figure before housing costs—9·5 per cent.—which the Select Committee states in the preface to its report is a much better measure of living standards?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right to make that important point, which I know will be taken up by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, who is the master of such issues, when he replies to the debate.

Will the hon. Member for Oldham, West confirm that his remarks yesterday referred, at best, to gross savings to the taxpayer, not to net savings? Will he confirm that he has taken no account of lower profits which lead to lower corporation tax or of the £1·5 billion cost of applying the minimum wage to the public sector? Is he aware that even that estimate of the cost of the minimum wage to the public sector is simply the cost of applying it to full-time workers over the age of 20, and includes no figure for restoring the differentials of public sector workers?

Even on the assumptions of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, the minimum wage would not save a penny, but would cost the taxpayer at least £200 million a year to implement. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that his figures assume that the introduction of the minimum wage would produce no increase in unemployment, which is contrary to the view of every independent expert who has considered the matter?

If, for the purposes of argument, we take the figure which the Labour party always uses as the cost to the taxpayer of every unemployed person, £8,000 a year, and apply it to UBS Philips and Drew's independent estimate that Labour's national statutory minimum wage would increase unemployment by 1·25 million, we find that, far from making a huge saving, Labour's policy could result in the taxpayer facing an extra bill of up to £10 billion a year. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has cleared that spending pledge with the shadow Chief Secretary? It is an unsustainable burden, the product of economic illiteracy and a testament to the fact that the Labour party is totally unfit to govern this country. It is for that reason that the head of the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies has said of the minimum wage:

"If the point is to avoid people being poor, this is an extraordinarily stupid way of doing it".

However, embracing extraordinarily stupid policies has become the stock in trade of the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

The last Minister in a Labour Government to have responsibility for low-pay policy, Mr. John Grant, reckons that, at a "modest estimate", the minimum wage would add £40 billion to the national wage bill. Of course, he is no longer a member of the Labour party, but there are plenty of people who are still socialists and have comprehensively denounced the minimum wage. Joe Haines of the *Daily Mirror* has written:

"the minimum wage proposals won't work and if they do, won't help".

The socialist Fabian Society has published a pamphlet which, despite all the wriggling of the hon. Member for Sedgefield and its author in recent days, is quite unequivocal in its denunciation of stage two of Labour's policy. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who I am delighted to see in his seat, has also expressed his doubts. The hon. Member for Sedgefield always gets terribly excited when I quote the hon. Member for Birkenhead, but he cannot deny that the hon. Member wrote, in an article in *The Times* in 1984:

"I calculate that the higher minimum wage target"—

that is, stage two of Labour's policy—

"could result in a loss of more than 400,000 women's jobs, a 4·4 per cent. rise in the total wage bill, together with a 2 to 2·5 per cent. rise in prices".

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am grateful to be able, for the first time, to lean over the Dispatch Box and repudiate what the Secretary of State has said.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman was misquoted.

Mr. Field: I was quoted accurately. As the quotation was accurate, does the Secretary of State agree with the first part of my argument: that we should move towards a lower target, with all the safeguards?

Mr. Howard: Of course I do not. The fact is that the hon. Gentleman has totally failed to persuade his party to remove even the second part of the target from its policy—it remains in all the policy documents. I have always acknowledged that the strictures of the hon. Member for Birkenhead applied to the second stage of the policy, yet that is still the second stage of the policy to which the Labour party remains wholly committed.—*[Interruption.]* That is the fact of the matter, and I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman must find it frustrating indeed.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. and learned Gentleman takes the biscuit. He assumes that the two-thirds calculation will apply immediately—not over time. Will he confirm that that is the assumption on which his estimate of 2 million is based, together with the assumption that everyone in the work force, including the Governor of the Bank of England, will get a 25 per cent. pay increase as a result of the minimum wage policy? Are not those assumptions absurd?

As the Secretary of State has just quoted from the Fabian Society pamphlet, let me tell him that, like everyone whom he quotes in his support, the author of that pamphlet had something to say about that. In common refrain of those whom the Secretary of State quotes, a couple of days ago the author said:

"Michael Howard persists in misrepresenting my Fabian pamphlet. All three of his quotations from it are used to support the opposite of their plain meaning in the pamphlet."

Mr. Howard: Naturally, the hon. Gentleman has gone to extraordinary lengths to try to persuade his friends to wriggle off the hook on which they are firmly impaled. The passages that I have quoted from the Fabian Society document are accurate——

Mr. Frank Field *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman when I have finished what I am saying about the Fabian Society.

The Fabian Society document quoted an estimate that up to 880,000 jobs would be lost as a result of the minimum wage policy pursued by the hon. Member for Sedgefield and his party. It is true that the Fabian Society says that it is in favour of a minimum wage, but it means a different kind of minimum wage. It does not favour the policy clearly and unequivocally set out in Labour party policy documents.

Mr. Field *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I shall give way in a moment, but I must first deal with the red herring introduced by the hon. Member for Sedgefield. He has raised it several times before and he is entirely mistaken.

The hon. Gentleman has repeatedly said—he has said it now across the Dispatch Box and he says it in letters to *The Independent* and elsewhere—that my estimates of job losses are based on the immediate introduction of Labour's national statutory minimum wage at the rate of two thirds of the median wage. That is absolutely untrue. Whether the minimum wage is introduced immediately or not has nothing to do with the calculations. The hon. Gentleman's objection would be relevant had I said that 2 million jobs would be lost immediately, but I have never said that. I have said that, whenever the policy were introduced, it would lead to the destruction of up to 2 million jobs.

If the hon. Member for Sedgefield is seriously saying that it will be of some comfort to the people of this country to be told that 2 million people will not lose their jobs immediately but may have to wait six months, a year, 18 months or even two years before losing them, he is living in even more of a fantasy world than I had assumed.

Mr. Blair: Everyone who has heard the Secretary of State talk about the minimum wage has been under the impression that he is saying that 2 million will be lost. If that is based on an immediate adoption of the two-thirds calculation and everyone getting a 25 per cent. wage increase, that is what I would call wriggling of a high order.

Let me tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman what my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will no doubt tell him in a moment. I have not put pressure on my hon. Friend to write the letter to the *Financial Times*; he wrote it of his own accord. In a letter to *The Independent* a few weeks ago, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that Labour Members of Parliament—in the plural—had condemned Labour's policy, but the only hon. Member whom he has ever cited is my hon Friend the Member for Birkenhead, who has denied it. If there are any others, will the Secretary of State let us know now?

Mr. Howard: The whole House will have seen the speed with which the hon. Member for Sedgefield abandoned the argument about the loss of 2 million jobs in relation to the timing of Labour's pledge. If the minimum wage were introduced at a rate of two thirds of the median wage, whether immediately or subsequently, it would cost up to 2 million jobs. The hon. Gentleman cannot criticise those calculations.

Mr. Field: The Secretary of State said earlier that my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) had leant on his friends so that they wriggled on the hook of their commitment or non-commitment to the minimum wage. I can answer only for myself. Will the Secretary of State now withdraw that accusation in so far as it applied to me? Will he accept that my hon. Friend did not communicate with me, nor did he ask anyone else to communicate with me? I wrote and then sent my hon. Friend a copy of the letter.

Mr. Howard: Naturally, if the hon. Member for Birkenhead says that, I unreservedly accept it. I did not refer specifically to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Let us get to the guts of the argument—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not want to get to the guts of the argument. They do not want to hear about the people who support my strictures on their disastrous policy. Let me remind the Labour party of what was said by Gavin Laird of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and Eric Hammond of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union. The hon. Member for Sedgefield issued a press release last week in which he claimed:

"the AEU is in favour of a minimum wage. Both Mr. Jordan and Mr. Laird are concerned to ensure that it is not used as a means of introducing wage restraint, a different matter altogether".

[Mr. Howard]

Mr. Laird was speaking specifically about the minimum wage when he said of any plans to introduce it in the private sector:

"there's no logic for it, it doesn't work in any other country and it certainly will not work in Great Britain".

If those are the words of a man supporting a policy, it is hardly necessary for me or my hon. Friends to oppose it. Even the hon. Member for Sedgefield would not dream of claiming that the EEPTU is anything other than totally opposed to the introduction of a national statutory minimum wage. No policy so strikingly illustrates the economic illiteracy of the Labour party, its determination to put its public sector pay masters before the national interest and its total unfitness to govern.

I suppose that Labour Front-Bench spokesmen may have believed that the tide of condemnation of this policy was at last turning when earlier this week an article appeared in a national newspaper defending the minimum wage. At least, they may have thought that, until they saw the article was by Mr. Ron Todd and that it appeared in the *Morning Star*——

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You know that this is a short, half-day debate. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is abusing the system. He is going on and on. It is time you got him to sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The Secretary of State has given way a good many times and I get the strong impression that he is approaching the end of his speech.

Mr. Howard: Of course the Labour party does not like hearing any of this or being reminded of the idiocy of its policy.

Mr. Ron Todd defended the policy, as I say, in the *Morning Star*. He is a doughty defender of lost causes, but I agreed with one point in his article. He said that the minimum wage was

"exactly the opposite of everything the Tories have imposed on our country over the last 12 years".

He was right. It is the exact opposite of everything that has occurred since 1979—the exact opposite of policies that have created 1·3 million jobs since then and 3 million jobs since 1983. It is the exact opposite of polices that took Britain to the top of the European growth league tables in the 1980s and of the policies which have given the British people record living standards, record prosperity and a record number of opportunities. The Labour party stands for the exact opposite of the achievements of this country since 1979. That is why the Opposition have lost, lost and lost again in the past 12 years, and it is why they will lose yet again when the people of this country next have their say.

5.1 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I want to make one observation about what I think has been happening to Britain under this Government and, if I can, to introduce a note of urgency on behalf of our low-paid constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has given us many important figures from the Select Committee report and I shall repeat none of them, but I want to use that information to describe how I and others see Britain today.

There have always been important income differences in Britain. Some say that they are class differences; others believe that that is not a meaningful term. An analogy is perhaps useful. Until 1979, Britain was like a railway journey. There were first-class, second-class, third-class and fourth-class compartments and differences depending on which compartment a person occupied. Despite that, all were part of a single train journey. Since 1979, however, the end carriage containing the poorest people has been de-linked. We want to introduce urgency to the debate so as to hold out some hope to people in the fourth compartment.

My second point is intended to introduce a sense of urgency on behalf of the constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House, and to explain why we should debate this issue. One of the greatest thrusts of Government policy has been to sell the idea of the market economy. There is not much difference between our parties on that now, and I am pleased about that. But if we have a market economy in which everything can be bought and sold and everything has a price, that price is important, particularly if the only thing that a person has to sell is his labour, and the price for it is miserably low. On behalf of those of our constituents who are single wage earners and who earn appallingly poor wages, I must point out that they look to this place for some redress. This is a doubly difficult task, the more so if these earners are responsible for families.

In our surgeries and as we move about our constituencies, we come across constituents who put to us very simply what it means to them to be low paid. They share the Government's idea that it is important to be in work. They strive to be in work, but they feel humiliated by the level of wages that they are paid. The Government have tried to turn this debate into a debate on Labour's policy, which is designed to hold out some hope to people who are continually humiliated by what the market pays them for what they can do best.

The Government and the Secretary of State have the cheek to talk about our ideas destroying jobs. I want to tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman what it means to have a job destroyed by privatisation. Imagine a man who thought it important to get up early in the morning before the buses and trains start running to travel through the wintry weather on his moped for miles to the local hospital, only to be told that his job and his mates' jobs have been privatised—that in future he can have a job but no longer a full-time job; that he will not be able to keep his family on the wages or even be able to claim family credit, given the hours that he will be able to work. So what he thought was sure has been torn up in his face.

What is more, that man has been paying for an occupational pension, responding to Government urgings not to rely on the state. But the firm that came in and tore up the full-time jobs and the dignity that went with them also destroyed the man's pension rights.

This debate has been about holding out hope to those who are in the fourth class carriage, which has been de-hooked from the rest of Britain and from the increases in income which—thank goodness—many have enjoyed under this Government as they have under others.

When we come to introduce a statutory minimum wage, we shall bear in mind what people say. I rejoice at the sight of the Secretary of State wriggling on his hook —about stages 1 and 2. He put across the message more clearly than we could have. He gave a clear statement to

those who expect hope from the Labour party as we approach a general election. The minimum wage will be introduced at a modest level and it will be linked to our other policies on training and investment. Ours will be a policy not only of dealing with individuals who earn low pay, important though they are to us, but of eradicating low-paid jobs.

Mr. Howard: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that nothing that he has said absolves him or anyone else from the need to make a careful examination of what the consequences of that policy would be? If a consequence of that analysis and of the analysis made by many independent experts is that a minimum wage would destroy so many jobs, does not it behove us all to take these points seriously and to put them across vigorously?

Mr. Field: Of course it does. That is why early in my time in Parliament I took a year to write a book calling for the distinction between stages 1 and 2 to which the Secretary of State has drawn attention. Indeed, he has had more success in drawing attention to it than I have had in my book and subsequent articles, and I am grateful to him for that.

Let no one try to detract from the urgency that binds us together in the Labour party in seeking ways to eradicate low pay, not to punish low-paid workers still further. We are mindful, of course, of the fact that tax policy, education, training and investment have important parts to play, too. In a way it is a tribute to the Government that, in their market-led economy, in which everything has its price, and in an age in which people can be pushed into work to bring home a wage packet, however small, we should press for a minimum wage in an attempt to bring some dignity to those people who are ashamed when they open their wage packets each week.

That is bad enough if one is a single person in Birkenhead earning low pay. I also bring to the attention of the House what is said by parents who bring home such a wage packet and who are still eligible for family credit. They say that the most humiliating part is the look in their children's eyes which says, "You've failed again." Our desire is to bring hope to those people, so that there will be a limit to the humiliation that the low-paid have to endure.

5.10 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I listened carefully to the points that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made so well. He made a case with which many of us have become familiar over the years. Although I agree with much that he said in respect of the feelings of those who have low incomes, we must acknowledge that some will remain low-paid whatever we do. In the early 1960s, I worked in the car industry, which was then one of the most prosperous in the country. A large proportion of unskilled workers in that industry received high wages by national standards, but still felt inferior and unable to cope in comparison with skilled workers who earned much more.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead is right to stress the urgency and importance of reviewing how the problems of the low-paid should be tackled by central Government. The present Government can take considerable credit for doing just that. One of the factors that makes it difficult for people to move from a low to a high income is the extent of the skills they possess and their relevance to the areas in which they want to live and work.

The present Government, uniquely in our history, have pursued a training policy that benefits those of 16 years of age and older. Previously, a large amount of training was not Government-inspired, but was provided by industry to the extent that it felt was necessary—and even then, it was not particularly well supported by the Government, except in terms of general education.

Today, Labour shares more than it did the belief that training is a major element in the development of an individual's skills and of his income. We should congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and the Government on their approach to the breadth of training now available. I refer to such innovations as the training credit system and to the provision by training and enterprise council-type institutions of a broader curriculum, which embraces not only those who have already displayed considerable abilities but others who have been frustrated by the limited facilities available to them at school. Today, the means to achieve higher qualifications are open to a much wider group, and, under Government policies, there availability will increase still further in future.

I remember sitting on a number of Committees on which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was opposed in his arguments by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), when he was Secretary of State for Employment. The hon. Member for Oldham, West usually acquitted himself well in those debates, but I had forgotten the extent to which that hon. Gentleman sticks to many old Labour party views.

Labour says that it will give extra money to one group, such as pensioners, and to another and another—but pays little regard to the source of that money and to whether it can ever be found. The hon. Gentleman made the same promise this afternoon. Labour is essentially saying, "We will give extra money to those on social security, and also introduce other measures such as a minimum wage." Where would that money come from?

My right hon. and learned Friend costed some of Labour's proposals at more than £30 billion. Even if Labour were ever in a position to try to implement its promises, it would be unable, within the constraints of a responsible economic policy, to do so at the speed that Labour suggests. If it did, it would create the inflation that we saw under the last Labour Government, with their high-spending approach to various sectors of society.

People in low-income groups have considerable problems, but how can they best be helped? The present Government have taken a realistic approach. After considering those most in need, the Government established a structure that makes it possible to distribute assistance in a better way. The Social Security Act 1988 provided considerably more help to many groups than they received before. Labour likes to knock the family credit system, arguing that it is impracticable and inappropriate, but it extends assistance to many low-income families.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Mid-Staffordshire): Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that the 1988 Act took away entitlement to any form of benefit to young people between the ages of 16 and 18? By cutting their training

[Mrs. Sylvia Heal]

programmes, the Government also denied those young people the opportunity to achieve better qualifications and thus make themselves more eligible to obtain employment.

Mr. Stevens: A training place is available to all 16 to 18-year-olds, and the 1986 Act enabled more to be done also for the disabled, who traditionally suffered from low incomes. The Government's general principles have shown a better way forward.

The Opposition attack what they call the quality of life today, but we have seen a tremendous increase in health service investment. The hon. Member for Birkenhead pointed out that a low income can affect diet, education, and many other aspects of a person's well-being. The Government's investment in education and in the health service has provided so much more to the advantage of the low-paid. The Government have also provided better access to education and training, with the result that opportunities have spread through to the lower income groups.

One must also put poverty into perspective. We have had reference to the EC recommendation of half average wages. That may be a fair measure, but any suggestion that poverty today bears any resemblance to that which had such a dramatic effect on health and mortality rates in the past is misleading. It is true that difficult circumstances affect health. However, thank goodness, very few people here live below such a poverty level even if it is below the level suggested in the EC measure.

The minimum wage is a policy that the Labour party will live to regret. It is not a practical proposition. It has been criticised by trade unionists and many others outside. I think that it was the hon. Member for Oldham, West—I apologise if it was not—who accused us of being the party of low wages. That is not true. The Tory party has been trying to create a situation in which wages can increase and there can be growth in real wages and the economy.

The Labour party used to be the party of low differentials in industry, and that was a cross that industry could not bear beyond the 1960s. As the effects of that approach took hold, many companies became unable to compete in both the wider European market and further afield. If there was anything that discouraged people from training for better jobs, it was the lack of differentials between skills. A school leaver given the choice of a comparatively unskilled job at a wage nearly as good as that for a skilled job after training would be likely to reject training.

The Opposition still have a great bias towards cutting differentials—and I am not saying that to justify the high wage increases of which we have heard recently. That bias is not only a detriment to training, but discourages people who should be flexible in their skills, rather than going into employment at the earliest opportunity, and it is a great disservice to the industry and commerce of the future.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Gentleman is surely aware that some three quarters of those who are on low pay are women, many of whom are looking for work that enables them to maintain their family responsibilities as near to home as possible. At that stage in their lives, many of them do not want to undertake training. Why should they be paid hourly sums of less than £3·40—in some cases much less? Why should they have to sell their labour at such a ridiculously low level that their families are living in poverty?

Mr. Stevens: I take the hon. Lady's point, but, since 1978-79, the real take-home pay of single people and married women on half average male earnings has increased by 38·6 per cent. There may still be cases such as those that the hon. Lady quotes, but there are many fewer of them.

The concern of all of us must be to support those on low incomes and to provide opportunities for those who, in some cases by no fault of their own, are in difficult situations. We have provided many facilities to enable development away from low incomes for many people.

I have another concern. Some people are still doing their A-levels when they are 19, perhaps because they started later, perhaps because they have to do a third year before starting further education, or perhaps because they are doing a different course. When they reach 19, child benefit for them ceases.

In such cases—for example, a one-parent family in which the mother is unable to work and so is on income support—there is no automatic right for child benefit to continue and there is no other benefit for that child in full-time education. This affects only a comparatively small number of families, but there is a case for continuing child benefit in such circumstances, until the end of the academic year in which the child is 19. It would be helpful to some families if that anomaly were sorted out.

In general, the Government are to be congratulated on the approach that they have taken to help all people to raise their incomes and standards of living.

5.25 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): My original intention was to congratulate the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on tabling the motion. Perfectly properly and rightly, it expands on some of the debates that we have been having on income equality to embrace some other important issues such as combating poverty and improving

"health, diet, educational achievement and individual opportunity."

It is sensible to have a broad-based discussion on this topic. Therefore, I was disappointed when the Government hijacked the debate by tabling their amendment, which enabled the Secretary of State for Employment to make the speech that he did.

Mr. Newton: Why should he not?

Mr. Kirkwood: Because, while I usually find social security debates fairly depressing, it is a long time since I have heard such cynical low-grade abuse being shovelled across the Dispatch Box from a Minister of such seniority. I agree with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that we are trying to give people opportunities, but nobody who listens to the debate or reads it in *Hansard* will understand that the Government have anything like the appreciation of the problems that they need to make progress. I do not say this lightly, but the Secretary of State for Employment did himself no good by adopting that approach to this important debate.

My party does not agree with the Labour position on a national minimum wage, although I appreciate the problems from which the idea is philosophically generated.

I agree with the analysis of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, although I do not think that a national minimum wage will help. Our idea, to move more in the direction of a partial basic income, is a different approach to the problem.

I was disappointed by the tone adopted by the Secretary of State for Employment and I hope that, in future, he will be kept out of social security debates. At least when the Secretary of State for Social Security insults people, he does it with some flash and style. He is entertaining, if nothing else.

People get frightened by the detail of social security policy. There is an essential difference between the two sides of the House. The Conservative Government have always done everything they could to maximise individual opportunity. However, certain consequences flow from that. That policy was encapsulated by the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) when she talked about there being no such thing as society. She thinks that there is no responsibility or duty on the Government to provide collectively, beyond maximising the opportunities for the individual.

That stance is perfectly reasonable and understandable, but neither I nor my colleagues or the official Opposition take that view. There is a case for collective provision, but one has to be careful about setting priorities for action. In the general election campaign, we shall argue that education and training should have priority for new resources. In addition, we shall have to try to find extra resources to address some of the social security problems.

I shall now consider the directions in which we should move. I welcome the increase in child benefit in October, but it should be paid now. It should be increased immediately to £9·25 for the first child and to £8·25 for other children. Initially, the benefit should be linked to prices, but over three or four years the difference in benefit between the first and second child should be phased out.

The Government should consider the possibility of ending the clawback for child benefit, especially after recent increases and the troubles that were caused by the reduction in child dependency allowances. Clawback should be removed, even if it means changing the rates for child premiums, so that the poorest families can be targeted. A net increase of £2 a week for the poorest families could be obtained by ending clawback and adjusting some child premiums. That would help to target resources, and it would not be too expensive.

Maternity grants should be increased to solve the problem of the additional cost of a first child. It should be about £200 a week for the first child and £75 to £100 for the second child. The changes to low-income benefits, apart from child benefits, could embrace immediately increasing the family premium for income support and family credit. The lower rate of income support for those under 25 should be abolished and we would redress the balance for 18-year-olds. There is a case for abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution to the poll tax, which is causing dire hardship.

A substantial reform of the social fund is required to introduce clear criteria of eligibility. That fund is failing in its role as a safety net of last resort for people on the lowest incomes. The Secretary of State for Social Security may wonder where the money for those proposals is to come from. Our policy document "Common Benefit" sets out a comprehensive scheme which would, over time, integrate the tax and benefit system so as to release benefits and resources.

Mr. Newton: I do not intend to launch a verbal assault on the hon. Gentleman, because he is delivering a thoughtful speech—more thoughtful than one that we heard earlier—but I am puzzled by his suggestions on child benefit. He appears to say that he would not knock it off income support in the traditional way, which is to set supplementary benefit and now income support against child allowances paid for by income-related benefits. The hon. Gentleman suggests what can only be an income-related form of child benefit. I do not understand the logic of that.

Mr. Kirkwood: We are advised that it is possible to end clawback of child benefit from families claiming income support, while at the same time adjusting child premiums to target the benefit more specifically. That is what we were told, although whether people are in favour of it is a different question.

Pension increases are necessary and our document suggests financing those increases by the long-term abolition of SERPS. Obviously, existing contracts and benefits would be retained for people on SERPS. We suggest recycling resources to give immediate help. That would enable us immediately to increase the state pension from £52 to £57·50 per week for single people and from £83·25 to £90 per week for a married couple. We could also afford an extra £2·50 a week for people over the age of 75 and £5 per week for those who are over the age of 80. That would obviously take time to phase in, because the benefits from abolishing SERPS would not appear for some time. We think that we could increase pensions dramatically.

The Government should turn their attention to carers. Invalid care allowance could be converted to some sort of carers' benefit and indexed to earnings. The restriction that the invalid care allowance is not paid to those who are above pensionable age should be phased out. It is quite wrong that such carers do not have access to that benefit. Such a change would be expensive and would have to phased in.

Many imaginative changes could be made at no cost, and that is the basis on which we have tried to approach some of poverty's difficult problems. The scourge of unemployment must be tackled more robustly than the Government seem to be set on doing. We have produced a package of measures which could quickly combat a rise in unemployment. They include energy conservation programmes, funding for more places in higher quality training programmes, and measures to release some of the capital receipts held by local authorities to enable them to decide, if they wish, to invest in such matters as housing repairs and school repairs. That would also have the benefit of insulating houses and reducing fuel bills. A cycle of improvements would reduce the problem of poverty and deal with other difficulties.

As I have said, in the long term, the tax and benefit systems should be integrated. The first step on that road would be to abolish the contributory principle. That argument has been around for a long time, but it is important for it to be advanced as an alternative, viable option to what the Government and the Opposition propose. It would take some time to integrate national insurance contributions and income tax. Tax and benefits

[Mr. Kirkwood]

could be integrated in a way that would ensure 100 per cent. take-up of benefits, and it would enable them to be targeted to the sections of our society that need them most.

A more towards partial basic income would benefit the system of delivery. A partial basic income or a citizen's income could effectively support needy families. We have calculated that, at 1991 prices, we could start with a partial basic income of £12 a week. That is in addition to child benefits and other basic benefits. Those who would gain most would be people such as non-working spouses and caring parents who, in addition to child benefit, would receive their own income as individuals. The main losers would be those on the top rate of tax, who effectively would have their national tax allowances restricted to the basic rate of tax.

These are other ways of approaching the problem. I accept that they are fairly radical and that they would take a long time to introduce in full, but we must make a start and embark on some of the routes that I have set out if we are to make any real progress. The ideas that I have canvassed have been costed, and I believe that they bear examination. I look forward to the debates that will ensue when the general election is called, because they will provide an opportunity to argue relative merits.

Whatever may be said about the mechanics of my party's scheme or those of the scheme proposed by the official Opposition, I think that the public recognise now that the balance of advantage in favour of the rich has gone too far. They understand now that public investment is necessary in our infrastructure and education and that the Government's policy of maximising opportunities for individuals and doing just about nothing else is a policy that has run its course and has run out of time.

I urge the Secretary of State to consider all the options and to examine ways of delivering help that is needed urgently by the constituents of every Member of this place who are on low incomes. If he does that, he will be able to produce better solutions than the Government have arrived at to date.

5.41 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I have attended many social security debates over the past four years, and my maiden speech was directed to social security. It is always a pleasure and a privilege to listen to the speeches of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), and his speech this afternoon was no exception to the rule.

I listened with care to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). Rightly or wrongly, I gained the impression that he felt that everything was the fault of the Government and that poverty began on 3 May 1979. I believe that that is a genuinely unfair characterisation of what has happened over the past 12 years, or what has happened in our country's history over the past century or more. As I have said before, I believe that no one in this place wants poverty. Sadly, it is a fact of life, however, that there are less well-off people and less fortunate people than others in our community. I believe also that the aim of the Government, whether it be Conservative, Labour, Liberal or whatever, is to try to improve the position of those who are genuinely less well-off in our society.

I suspect that the divisions between the Government and the Opposition are based not so much on attaining the end of a policy that is designed to improve the position of the less well-off, as on how to arrive at the right policy. There can be some fairly fundamental differences of opinion when it comes to determining the right policy, and at least I have the reasonableness and decency to accept that there are differences of opinion rather than to try to blame everything that goes wrong on the Opposition, whether that is related to social security policy, foreign policy, defence policy or whatever.

I have open-mindedness to examine and accept the point of view of others at a time when I do not believe that there is that much openness in the views of Opposition Members. I do not want to go through a host of statistics to compare 1974-79 with the current Conservative Government, but I shall refer to five figures to present the other side of the coin following the selective figures that were used by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. If anyone casts his mind back to the 1970s, he will accept that it takes some nerve to gloss over that period in our history and to try to portray that Government in the light that is presented by Opposition Members. I have in mind the humiliation of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), who had to leave an aeroplane before it flew out of Heathrow to take its passengers to an International Monetary Fund meeting. There then followed many genuine cuts in public spending.

I remind the hon. Member for Oldham, West that during 1974-79 pensioners' total incomes increased less than a fifth as fast as they have under this Conservative Government. I remind him that spending on benefits for the family during the same period was cut by nearly 8 per cent. and that the average annual increase in benefits for the disabled was only £325 million compared with £555 million since 1979. I remind him also that single people and married women on half average earnings suffered a 1 per cent. drop in incomes during 1974-79 compared with a 39 per cent. rise under this Government.

Married men on half average earnings enjoyed, if that is the right word—I somehow doubt it—a 2·4 per cent. rise in incomes under the Labour Government compared with a 34 per cent. increase since 1979. Finally, a married couple with one earner on half average earnings with two children had a 4·2 per cent. rise under the Labour Government compared with a 29 per cent. rise under this Government.

Ms. Short: We can all quote partial figures about the Labour Government. The entire House must accept, however, that since 1979 Britain has become more unequal than it has been for a long time. Inequality has increased and therefore there is more poverty. That is what the Government have produced.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman——

Ms. Short: Hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Burns: I apologise profusely. I of all people should not have made that mistake.

I do not accept the hon. Lady's proposition. Under this Government the economy has developed and wealth has been generated so that we are now spending a record amount on the social security budget. We are spending over £50 billion a year, over £1 billion a week.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Unemployment is increasing.

Mr. Burns: Before the hon. Gentleman continues to harangue me from a sedentary position, he should accept that Conservative Members appreciate that part of that spending is the result of unemployment. That was true also when the Labour Government faced high and increasing levels of unemployment.

Over and above that, however, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has fought his corner in Cabinet and has secured an extremely good deal for the less well-off in our society. He has ensured that the disabled, pensioners, the ill and the unemployed have all received increases, in many instances well above the rate of inflation. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) does not just once in a while strengthen his case by paying a little tribute to some of the achievements of Conservative Ministers. It does no one any good to suggest that everything that the other party does is wrong. The hon. Gentleman would enhance his own street cred in Nottingham if he had a little more graciousness in accepting that.

Apparently there is a new policy that will be the answer to all the problems of poverty in Britain, and that is the national minimum wage. Do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer to this question: what have Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union, Gavin Laird of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, Eric Hammond of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union and Joe Haines of the *Daily Mirror* in common? The answer is that they are all opposed to a national minimum wage.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken about Bill Morris, who has shown enormous support for our efforts to introduce a national minimum wage and for a range of measures designed specifically to assist the low-paid.

Mr. Burns: I shall accept that correction if that is the fact. I understood that the TGWU had this week come out categorically against a national minimum wage. If it has not, I stand corrected. I still stand by my proposition that Gavin Laird, Eric Hammond and Joe Haines are all utterly opposed to a national minimum wage. They are opposed to it because of the impact that it will have on jobs.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), on a more coy note in *The Independent* to which he referred and which he desperately tried to disown earlier in an intervention on my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment—I quote it again because it is just as relevant now as it was an hour and a half ago when he was wriggling so unsuccessfully—wrote:

"I have not accepted that the minimum wage will cost jobs . . . I have simply accepted that econometric models indicate a potential jobs impact."

What does that mean? I suspect that it will mean some job losses, but the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to say so to his colleagues and his trade union friends. I suspect that the public relations boys at Walworth road worked long into the night to obtain an acceptable draft to send to *The Independent* to save the hon. Gentleman's face.

The truth of the matter, which the hon. Gentleman fears so much, is that up to 2 million jobs could be lost with a national minimum wage, but I advise the House not just to take that figure from me. A number of respected independent analysts have predicted for stage 1 only job losses of between 64,000 and 1 million, depending on which independent survey one chooses to accept. For stage 2, the university of Liverpool has predicted that up to 1·4 million jobs could be lost. The Institute of Fiscal Studies —to whom pronouncements Opposition Members often pay lip service when it suits their arguments—condemned the proposal in the most scathing of terms:

"If the point is to avoid people being poor, this is an extraordinarily stupid way of doing it."

Many hon. Members will agree with that sentiment. I understand that even the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has been more forthright than the hon. Member for Sedgefield. In what must be one of the greatest understatements of the year, he has admitted that a minimum wage policy would mean that

"One of two might lose their jobs."

That suggests that the Labour party has done some work trying to calculate the impact of a minimum wage policy on Britain's economy. It would be in everyone's interests if the Labour party were prepared to publish the work that has gone into producing the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predictions so that we, too, can analyse the figures and see what he has come up with. Given the controversy and the number of different organisations that are predicting significant job losses, why is it so reluctant to publish any research on that important point? If it has not done any research, not only is that negligent—surely one must inspect the impact of the policies that one hopes to put to the country at the next general election—but how on earth can the right hon. and learned Gentleman predict that "one or two might lose their jobs"?

Ms. Short: I have been near the centre of the development of the minimum wage policy and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there is no unpublished Labour party research. What we have done is look at all the academic literature in detail and thoroughly and we do not misrepresent it in the way that the Tory party does.

Mr. Burns: If that is so and some policy study group has examined the matter and, if I understood the hon. Lady correctly, all the different studies that have come out, and if the predicted range of job losses for stage 1 has been between 64,000 and 1 million, why did the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East say that "one or two" might lose their jobs? If he was being candid, he would have said that more than one or two might lose their jobs.

I cannot explain it, but I suppose that I am not expected to fathom the right hon. and learned Gentleman's mind. It is odd that he is mentioning such a minimal figure if the Labour party has studied all the surveys that have been published. I trust that between now and the general election the Labour party will be a little more forthcoming about how it views all those studies and let the country know precisely what, in its opinion, the impact of a national minimum wage would be.

I should be grateful if, when he replies, the hon. Member for Sedgefield—he is not in his place, but I am sure that the hon. Member for Oldham, West will pass on the message to him—would answer three questions which should be answered. First, what is the Labour party's estimate of how many jobs a national minimum wage would destroy? Secondly, how can the Labour party justify advocating a policy which, by its own admission, would destroy jobs? Thirdly, if the Labour party cannot

[Mr. Burns]

persuade its trade union backers to accept a national minimum wage, how on earth does it expect anyone else to accept the policy?

Mr. Allen: The trade unions accept it.

Mr. Burns: In that case, I return to my original point. Gavin Laird does not accept it. Eric Hammond does not accept it.

Ms. Short: One or two individuals.

Mr. Burns: Opposition Members must not forget that the trade unions are the Labour party's paymasters. When the trade unions click their fingers, the Labour party usually jumps. I am not convinced that when the general election is called a national minimum wage in its current form will be official Labour party policy. There are up to 10 or 11 months in which the trade unions can get their claws into the parliamentary Labour party and ensure that it toes the line. It will be fascinating to watch that process.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that 155 Opposition Members are sponsored by unions? Is not the loss of 2 million jobs only the tip of the iceberg? Does not the Labour party's disastrous economic policy mean that the figure will be nearer 4 million?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his typically robust intervention. I was aware that more than 150 Opposition Members are sponsored by trade unions. I suspect that in the coming months there will be a great deal of tension, particularly among those hon. Members sponsored by the AEU or, if the EETPU sponsors Members of Parliament, perhaps among them, too. I see the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) smiling. I wonder whether he will still be smiling when the general election is called. If so, will his trade union still be smiling if it is so diametrically opposed to the official Labour party policy of a national minimum wage?

No doubt, over the coming months, the matter will be argued hard and fast throughout Britain. Now is not the time to continue highlighting the Labour party's embarrassment on the issue. I shall watch with fascination to see the trade unions and those who are so opposed to a national minimum wage make sure that the Labour party toes the line in time for polling day, whenever that may be.

5.58 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It is a great honour to be called in a debate in which my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has made such a superb contribution. I am one of a generation of social security students who served an apprenticeship under him without him knowing it. I owe him a great debt for all that he has taught me over many years in his work on poverty and social security.

It is sad that we continue to debate poverty in Britain in the 1990s. The Government have been in power since 1979. I agree with the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) that poverty did not start in May 1979, but it became part of the vocabulary which was abolished from Government statements in 1979. That was the beginning of a period in which the abolition of poverty ceased to be one of the Government's objectives.

Since then, we have experienced three phases in the debate about poverty. The early 1980s saw a massive increase in the amount of poverty, which was caused by unemployment. The mid-1980s saw the punishing of the poor, through legislation such as the Social Security Act 1988. That Act abolished benefits for those aged under 18, and reduced them for those under 25. Now, we are seeing the results on the streets of London—destitution among young people, which should not be tolerated by a society that claims to be civilised. The results of the 1988 Act were compounded by those of the deregulation in employment, and the abandoning of local authority housing as an affordable form of accommodation for those on low incomes.

Finally, in the late 1980s, a further growth in unemployment led to a deepening of poverty. People who, only two or three years ago, believed that they were sharing in the benefits of an economic miracle have been forced into redundancy; they are losing their businesses and, at the same time, being hit by the punitive social security policies that the Government introduced in the mid-1980s.

Throughout that period, Ministers officially denied that poverty existed. In Wales—to which I shall address most of my remarks—there has been an additional denial: no one must mention poverty, lest it tarnish the country's image for potential overseas investors.

Low-income family statistics have been suspended, and then abandoned. Although we are debating a problem that affects probably 30 per cent. of people who are in or on the margins of poverty, we cannot see a regional breakdown for Wales; we cannot see official statistics telling us how many people are suffering poverty in a country with a population of 3 million.

Organisations such as the Welsh Development Agency have tried to pretend that poverty is part of the historical legacy of Wales. It is no longer a subject for debate, because to discuss it now would tarnish that image. I am sorry that no Welsh Conservative Members are present this evening, although I am aware that nowadays there are only six in the House.

The evidence of poverty in Wales can be found in a number of important reports, which deserve to be studied. There is the report by Jeanetta McAllister, of University college, north Wales, which examined rural poverty in Arfon, Gwynedd; there is, indeed, the Welsh economic review carried out by the Cardiff business school, and published by it under the title "Why are wages so low in Wales?" We have not seen much evidence from the Welsh Office, but, in 1986, the Welsh inter-censual survey showed that 43 per cent. of Welsh households were living on less than £80 a week—and that was at the height of Wales's so-called economic miracle. In the light of the increase in unemployment since 1986 and the sheer extent of poverty in Wales now, I urge the Welsh Office to conduct further studies.

The Low Pay Unit has also carried out some work, to which I must confess to having contributed. That contribution led me to want to enter the House, and I am very happy to have done so following the recent Monmouth by-election. According to the Low Pay Unit, one in four men in Wales earns less than the Council of Europe decency threshold, while 70,000 women work full-time for less than £130 a week, and one in five work for less than £120 a week. Do not those simple figures present an overwhelming case for a statutory minimum wage?

As I said in my maiden speech, there is no work ethic like that of the low-paid: people who work full-time for incomes that—after tax, national insurance and travelling expenses—are barely, if at all, above their social security entitlements. Six out of 10 women in Wales earn less than the Council of Europe decency threshold; one in four in Clwyd and Dyfed work full-time for less than £120 a week. In my own county, Gwent, one in four men and 60 per cent. of women are earning less than the Council of Europe decency threshold. Those figures surely provide overwhelming evidence of the need for a statutory minimum wage.

Nevill Hall hospital has become quite well known in recent weeks. Anyone who talks to the porters and ancillary workers, who have just had their pay increased to £114 a week, will see the case for a minimum wage. All that we are suggesting is an initial minimum wage of £130 a week—£3·40 an hour. That is hardly over-generous; those who say that they cannot support it will condemn thousands to total poverty.

According to the Welsh inter-censual survey, my constituency contains the most affluent local authority district in Wales. Beautiful areas, however, often mask serious problems of poverty and social deprivation. Monmouth, both urban and rural, is a prime example of the way in which an area of outstanding natural beauty, which appears to support comfortable life styles, can conceal such problems. Poverty exists in Monmouth, just as it exists in other places.

We need only visit the jobcentres at Chepstow, Abergavenny and Monmouth to see how appallingly low are the wages for the jobs that they advertise. I wish that the Department of Employment could ensure that those who place the advertisements paid as much heed to the legal wage council rates as they are forced to pay to the sex discrimination and race relations laws. At every jobcentre, no end of jobs are advertised that pay illegally low wages.

In the five weeks in which I have been a Member of Parliament, I have found the most disturbing aspect of representing the people of Monmouth to be meeting the growing number who are either homeless or threatened with homelessness. The problem is growing rapidly. On current figures, the number of people applying to be considered homeless by Monmouth borough council will be twice as large this year as last. That is an appalling indictment of the Government's housing policy: they have effectively abandoned local authority housing, in favour —or so they claim—of housing association provision. Even the housing associations would be the first to admit that they are incapable of replacing local authorities as providers of enough housing to prevent the present degree of homelessness.

Monmouth borough council is the only Conservative district authority left in Wales. Its housing strategy statement states that the market can never respond to housing needs. From that it is obvious that homelessness can never be dealt with under the council's present provisions. Despite the claims of the Conservative authority, it is clear that people have a right to rent from local authorities—they deserve that right. The problem of homelessness in Monmouth is becoming greater, and it is causing embarrassment to many Conservative members of the borough council.

What is the quality of life for those who bought their council houses in the heyday of the right-to-buy campaign and whose houses are now being repossessed as a result of rising unemployment? What is the quality of life for those people who face little choice, but to go into tardy bed-and-breakfast accommodation because the local authority has no housing provision, as well as a five-year waiting list, which is not moving?

The evidence of the effects of poverty on people's quality of life is now becoming overwhelming. An important report was recently completed by Professor Johnathan Bradshaw, which was sponsored by UNICEF. He stated:

"There is no evidence that improvements in the living standards of the better off have 'trickled down' to low income families with children."

A recent report by the National Children's Home showed that one in five parents have gone hungry in the past month because they did not have enough money to buy their family sufficient food of decent nutritional value.

Mr. Allen: That is one reason why the differential between the top 20 per cent. of earners and the bottom 20 per cent. is higher now than it has been for more than 100 years. Does my hon. Friend agree that that looks very much like a return to Victorian values?

Mr. Edwards: We are not only witnessing a return to Victorian values, but a Government policy to return us to Victorian conditions. The figures behind my hon. Friend's statement were set out in yesterday's edition of the *Financial Times*.

The approach to the poor adopted by the three present Welsh Office Ministers demonstrates that there is a chasm between their thinking on the subject and that of others. The Secretary of State for Wales claimed in a recent speech that there was a need to start looking at poverty seriously. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), is a co-author of a No Turning Back Group policy document, "Choice and Responsibility". That document states:

"As in third party car insurance, most citizens would be required to insure themselves for their old age, sickness, ill-health and unemployment."

If that is not opting out, what is?

The people need to know the status attached to that policy document. They must know the extent to which it will be incorporated into Conservative party policy should it form the next Government—I am sure that it will not. The people must know to what extent the policy of privatising unemployment benefit and old-age pensions has been accepted by Ministers.

6.13 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The title of the debate, "Low Income and the Quality of Life", should have led to a stimulating debate had the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) undertaken a proper analysis of the subject. Sadly, that was not the case. He did not address the second part of his motion, which relates to the effects of poverty

"on health, diet, educational achievement and individual opportunity."

The problem for the Labour party is they opposed the sensible Conservative measures introduced in the past 11 years which have addressed the problems indentified in the motion. They have opposed many of the recent reforms in the health service, for example, which will increase access to health care and will reduce waiting lists.

Look at the way in which the Government are targeting deprivation payments to general practitioners in inner-city

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

areas. They are specifically designed to help people most in need. Improvements in educational standards in inner-city areas has meant that those who traditionally did not have access to education no longer face that problem. The Government, by extending choice through the use of city technology colleges, have introduced new horizons for those who previously did not have education opportunities. Surely that is what is meant by "individual opportunity"? We have provided the opportunity not only for those who can afford to seize it, but for others. That has been the result of the improvement in public services that has taken place under the Government and that policy will be a plank of the next election manifesto.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West did not recognise the massive increase in public expenditure in the social services sector, especially in respect of families. Those increases are an important part of any analysis of the quality of life of people. Expenditure on benefits for the family has increased by 29 per cent. above inflation under the Government. The October increases will mean that £500 million extra has gone to less well-off families since 1988. Family credit helps more than 340,000 families on low earnings and the average amount given is more than £30 a week.

Those important contributions could be provided only by a Government who are understanding enough to realise that, unless one gives people who are capable of creating wealth the incentive to do so, insufficient funds can be distributed to those most in need. That recognition is the signal achievement of the Government. The policy of taking some people out of tax altogether is one of many other significant achievements of the Government in the past 11 years.

Other issues, often controversial, must be analysed. The motion refers to diet, but the coronary prevention group of the Guild of Food Writers has clearly stated:

"If you want to spend less money buying healthy food all year round, this is now not hard to do."

It is important to appreciate that it is possible to maintain a decent quality of life and a reasonable diet by means other than massive Government intervention or one's wealth. There are all sorts of possibilities open to people, but I accept that that requires better education and information. However, the opportunities are available to people if they want to take them.

Another matter of concern is the failure of the Labour party to analyse the effect of the minimum wage not just on the absolute number of jobs, but on whether it assists the reduction of poverty, which is another important criterion to analyse. It is interesting that the *Financial Times* of 25 June stated:

"Minimum wages have rarely achieved their intended effect".

It called them

"the poor cousin of poverty fighters."

That article referred specifically to the OECD report on France, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred earlier. It said that France's relatively high 9 per cent. unemployment rate and the rising proportion of long-term jobless, particularly among the more vulnerable, is attributable in part to that country's minimum wage proposals. The absolute number of people affected is important, but so is the categories who are most disadvantaged. The *Financial Times* report referred to them as

"the young, older workers and the unskilled."

It is extremely worrying if that is the effect of introducing a minimum wage. The hon. Member for Oldham, West displayed a smug cynicism in his attempt to claim that the minimum wage would assist people. That assertion must be put in context with the statistical evidence to the contrary provided by much independent research. I hope that Labour will be more honest when it analyses its policies.

The introduction to a report published by the OECD in spring 1991 says:

"A minimum wage, if it is to be effective in reducing poverty, must be fixed above the market-clearing wage. But the corollary of this is that it is likely to cause employment losses. This latter effect may be particularly important in youth labour markets since young people tend to be over-represented amongst the lower paid."

If Labour's policy is to increase the risk of exposure to poverty and hardship, that should be of much concern to the categories that are most exposed to that policy. It is a particular form of cynicism that the Labour party should be trying to introduce a minimum wage.

The OECD's latest survey goes into more detail. I do not have time to deal with it, but I draw Labour Members' attention to it because if they read it they would understand why their Labour-influenced newspaper *The People* said:

"Labour's plan for a national minimum wage is not the answer. It would only cause more unemployment and deny jobs to those who most need them."

That is at the heart of the worries about Labour's minimum wage proposals, which are more likely to exacerbate hardship among people who are most in need, whom the Government have tried to assist. Labour's proposals would not necessarily address the problems of people who are already low-paid.

Many of the social problems of low income and poverty and of the difficulties of the most disadvantaged in our community will not be solved by Government action alone. The problem of increasing social tensions, which has arisen over decades and not only under this Government, is caused perhaps by the breakdown in community spirit. Part of that breakdown has been caused by the increase in the dependency culture and over-reliance on Government handouts. We must try to re-establish the importance of understanding how a community can help itself and how it can assist deprived members of the community. Many academics, including Charles Murray, have said that it is not only poverty that is important; it is the attitude of the people who are in that category.

Such people will be helped not by Government action alone but by other people who live in their community. The Government have done much to encourage charitable giving so that the people who are closest to the difficulty can assist those who are most in need. The combination of Government assistance through the social security system —our record is admirable—assistance to charities and encouragement of the community spirit, which enables people to help each other, is the right way to assist our people and the right way to approach this debate, rather than offering bogus theories of a minimum wage which would leave many people much worse off, particularly those who are least able to protect themselves.

6.22 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I should like to associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and with his criticisms of the Secretary of State's speech.

The Secretary of State's performance was a caricature of a cynical politician. It was what most people in the country think of politicians—long-winded and arrogant, and showing no concern for fellow citizens who work hard but run out of money at the end of the week. The right hon. and learned Gentleman gave a misleading account of the academic evidence on the likely job impact of a national minimum wage. He gave a deplorable performance, which showed that he has no concern for people.

We are reaching the end of a failed economic experiment that has done much damage to many people. Before it began, J. K. Galbraith said that Britain was about to make a great contribution to world civilisation by offering to test to destruction the theories of monetarism. We have done that, and many people have been hurt. It has failed economically and politically.

The Conservative party ditched the previous Prime Minister because the effects of Thatcherism had become horrendously unpopular. It got rid of her so that it could get a new image in time for the next election.

The Government's economic record is clear. Since the second world war, no Government have achieved a lower rate of economic growth—1·75 per cent. They ditched the last Prime Minister because her unpopularity meant that she could not win again, but the centrepiece of Thatcherism was that greater inequality would lead to greater economic efficiency—that, by cutting public spending, people would buy services and greed would make the economy more efficient. Our country has become much more unequal, but that was the centrepiece of Thatcherism.

The figures on the changes in the tax and benefit system are shocking. Figures from John Hills show that, up to 1989, £6·5 billion was taken from the bottom 40 per cent. of the population and that most of it was given to the top 10 per cent. in tax handouts. The Government took money from people who had the least and gave it to very rich people.

That was a deliberate policy. Another strand of that policy was a series of measures to encourage low-paid employment. The Government removed protection that prevented competition by wage cutting, such as the fair wages resolution, and removed young people from the protection of the wages councils. They introduced the young worker scheme, which offered employers subsidies provided that they paid employees £40 a week or less. A whole raft of measures positively encouraged low pay. They were enormously successful. There has been much growth in low pay under the Government.

Low pay is bad for families and for the individuals who receive it. It is hard if someone works hard but ends up with so little that he or she cannot live and pay for the necessities of life.

Low pay is also bad for the economy and it always goes with low investment, poor training and high labour turnover. The Government have encouraged low pay and such employment conditions in large parts of our economy. It is bad for economic performance, which is partly why economic growth under the Government has been so appalling.

The Government boast about family credit, but if they encourage employers to pay less than a living wage, they must do something about it to bring people's money up to survival level. They boast about and encourage family credit, yet they are subsidising inefficient, hopeless employers who cannot pay a living wage. That is a ridiculous way to subsidise industry. It is a subsidy for inefficiency, for rotten employment conditions, for no training and for no investment. Our policy is not to get rid of family credit—we will keep it as long as it is needed—but we shall raise the bottom level so that most people do not need it, which will lead to a saving in public expenditure.

The Government's misrepresentation of the academic evidence on the national minimum wage is unprecedented. Their claim that unemployment would increase by 2 million is disgraceful. It is false, it is lies and it is deceit. If we are to have a serious argument about low pay and a national minimum wage, let us get all the academic evidence. The briefing that the Government give their Back Benchers, who mouth the same, silly ill-informed nonsense, is unworthy of the House and brings it into disrepute.

The overwhelming bulk of low-paid workers in Britain are women. I think of that every time the Prime Minister sneers about the undesirability of a national minimum wage. But, of course, he is the Prime Minister without a woman in his Cabinet, who does not care about women's work being undervalued. Home helps and a whole range of people with important skills are low-paid. Much women's work is undervalued and underpaid. That is unjust and wrong. Women want a national minimum wage and will be the major beneficiaries, which is an important reason for the Tories to despise the proposition.

I am a sponsored member of the National Union of Public Employees. I am pround of it because that union represents many low-paid, overwhelmingly women, workers. I get no personal benefit of any sort as a result of being sponsored by NUPE. My local Labour party receives £650 a year to help with political campaigning and something towards the cost of my election expenses.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Ah!

Ms. Short: I hope that the hon. Gentleman and Conservative Members will listen carefully to what I am saying, because I mention the matter in all seriousness. It means that I am hooked organisationally into a union that represents low-paid workers. I meet those people regularly. I attend various events and I have close links with NUPE in the west midlands—all of which means that I never forget that there are many low-paid women workers. They passionately want a national minimum wage. I am proud to discuss the whole matter with them, and I seek in the House to represent the interests of many low-paid women workers.

Do Conservative Members consider that there is something wrong with that? It represents a democratic link with a large number of people in society. I am speaking of a large group of people who need a voice. I am proud to represent that voice here—*[Interruption.]*—and I cannot imagine why Conservative Members sneer at that.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Nobody is sneering.

Ms. Short: I heard Tory Members sneering at our trade union links. I have explained my trade union link. I am proud of it and it is good for democracy. There is certainly nothing cynical about it.

Mr. Burns: I said that, if a union such as the AEU was passionately against a national minimum wage, I suspected that it would do what it could to persuade Opposition Members who were sponsored by that union to understand the position and, one hopes, accept the union's point of view.

Ms. Short: I respect the hon. Gentleman, but on this occasion he is talking out of his ill-informed brief. The AEU supports the TUC, and its policy is in favour of a national minimum wage.

Mr. Barnes: What about Gavin Laird?

Ms. Short: Gavin Laird, speaking as an individual, has been critical of it. He is only one individual. But the union, which represents many thousands of people, takes a different view. Gavin Laird may not agree with his union's policy and he is entitled to express his view. Conservative Members are so ignorant about the way in which our unions work and how democracy operates that they think that the remarks of one individual mean that the whole union is opposed to the introduction of a national minimum wage.

The TUC supports the policy. The EETPU is outside the TUC and seems to be hostile to it, but that is not the view of the entire trade union movement. Some of the higher-paid, skilled unions did not like the idea at first, but after an intense debate in the movement—it has been going on for many years and has involved a great deal of academic research—many of them have been persuaded of the rightness of the policy.

Conservative Members should reflect that the whole of the rest of western Europe and the United States has a national minimum wage. If it has been such a disaster, how have those countries managed? I think I see the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Secretary of State shaking his head in dissent. He is wrong. He should not just shake his head in that way and mislead the House, as he did earlier.

The Prime Minister tried to create a new image after the disaster of Thatcherism. Thatcher had to be ditched and the new Prime Minister said he wanted a classless society. That can never be achieved in a deeply unequal society. If we are to have fairness and justice, allowing people the capacity to move about and use their talents, society must be fairly equal.

The Conservatives have made Britain much more unequal and have destroyed many people's lives. Labour will bring in a much fairer system, with a national minimum wage, a fair tax system and a fair benefits system. The country will be a better, more attractive and more enjoyable place in which to live, and we shall have a more economically efficient society.

6.35 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): All the speeches and interventions of Opposition Members have been based on the idea that poverty must be defined in relation to average incomes or wages. I accept that there is considerable academic and international support for that concept, but we have not heard much about the relative quality of life at various stages.

It has been said—the European definition has been relied on—that half average wages is poverty. The hon. Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), in her speech and intervention, relied heavily on the concept of relative poverty, but nothing has been said by Opposition Members about what has happened to the level of average earnings in the 11 years while we have been in office. Surely, if we are concerned with relative poverty and the fate of those whose position is defined in relation to average incomes, we should be very concerned indeed about the overall level of average earnings.

Average household incomes increased between 1979 and 1987 by about 32 per cent. in real terms—an important fact for those living on the lowest incomes. It seems unsatisfactory to define poverty solely by reference to average incomes because if that were the true position, Labour Members could eliminate poverty completely—if they were able to do so—by expropriating all incomes of, say, 50 per cent. of average incomes or above. That would make for a tremendous reduction in poverty, according to the definition of Opposition Members, but nobody would be any happier or better off. It might please those with egalitarian passions, but it would not add anything to the good of the country.

Because the whole debate if based so firmly on the concept of relative poverty, that concept is being related to assumptions which should not be used to monopolise the subject. I see the attraction of those definitions for Opposition Members, because they make matters awkward for a party which is not committed to equality of incomes, to very high taxation and to attempting to equalise incomes. However, it is possible to believe that it is important to seek to eradicate poverty without being committed to the doctrinaire equalitarian ideas of equalising incomes at all levels.

Most people living in some degree of relative poverty are less concerned with their relationship to average incomes than with their previous and present standard of living. They are more contented if they have improved their standard of living and are giving a better standard to their children than they enjoyed. Those matters are far more important to most of our constituents.

An examination of the way in which the material things of life have been enjoyed since 1979—whatever indices are taken from social trends and censuses and so on—makes it clear that even families on low incomes are enjoying more of the better things in life than was the case in 1979. Far fewer families live in overcrowded accommodation; there are far fewer families without bathrooms and with outside lavatories; there is much less overcrowding than in 1979; more people have refrigerators, cars and foreign holidays even among the lowest income groups; and there is better access to advanced medicine for all groups within society. Life expectancy has increased substantially since 1979. Although there has been some criticism about wage levels in the million extra jobs that have been created since 1979, those jobs have contributed enormously to household incomes.

I am sorry that more emphasis has not been placed in this debate on the relative quality of life for all citizens and for the poorest citizens by comparing what people enjoyed in 1979 with what they enjoy now. That consideration is at least as important as comparisons between low and average wages.

6.40 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): There are three ways to improve spending power—charity, state handouts and better wages. I invite Conservative Members to say which they would prefer to improve their standard of living.

Will the Secretary of State for Employment explain why, during the weeks of Tory attacks on Labour's plans to make employers stump up and pay at least £3·40 an hour—which is not a fortune by anyone's standards—the Government have not uttered one word of concern about the plight of people on low pay? The Government have not recognised the facts, but we know their attitude because of what they have done to the wages councils. They failed to recognise that so many people on low wages were involved in those councils.

It has been mentioned today that the Secretary of State has just had his 50th birthday. I am amazed that someone who has spent half a century on this earth remains so ignorant of the circumstances of many of our fellow British citizens. I suggest that he takes a walk round Maryhill when I shall show him the standard of living of people on low wages in such an area. I am not interested in how he spends his birthday—I am interested in the birthdays of the kids of people who cannot afford to provide decent birthdays for their children and who get into debt trying to do so.

I shall say a few words about trade unions, although I have only a few minutes. My own union, the Transport and General Workers Union, supports the minimum wage. Although the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union is outside the Trades Union Congress, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said, its members gave the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer a standing ovation when he took the battle right into its camp and attacked Eric Hammond's refusal to accept the minimum wage proposal. Members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union have never made a wage claim based on the pay of assistants in dry cleaning shops or of waitresses in cafeterias. However, many male car workers have a wife, mother or daughter who earns low wages in jobs that have no trade union organisation and for which there are no wage councils, and they are not in the least averse to their wives, mothers, daughters, friends and neighbours receiving decent pay.

The TUC supports the minimum wage. Norman Willis has had letters supporting the minimum wage published in the national press, so let us have no nonsense or pretence that the trade union movement is against a minimum wage. A few leading individuals are against the proposal, but they are not the voice of the trade union movement as a whole. Let us stop the attempt to deceive the House and the British public about the stance of the trade union movement.

6.43 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): If ever a ploy backfired, it was the attempt to hijack this debate. The Secretary of State for Employment is faced with the fastest-rising level of unemployment anywhere in the western world. According to the report published last week by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development job creation in this country will be lower this year than anywhere in the western world. Next year, this will be the only country in Europe in which the number of jobs created will fall. We have the lowest growth and the lowest investment. We are the only country to suffer low growth four years in a row. Faced with that, what does the Secretary of State tell us today? Absolutely nothing.

The same OECD report states that skill shortages and inadequate training are responsible for high unemployment. Who but the Secretary of State is responsible for those skill shortages? Thousands of people are waiting for training places. We know from documents leaked from his Department that the relationship between the training and enterprise councils and the Government is not sustainable. We know that Britain has the worst skills deficit of any country in Europe, but what has the Secretary of State told us about that today? Nothing. When he had the chance to debate poverty seriously—an issue that matters to millions—what did he do? He elbowed the Secretary of State for Social Security out of the way and attacked Labour's minimum wage proposal.

There can be no more pertinent example of what the Government have become than the fact that faced with the fastest-rising unemployment and the worst skills shortage, the Department of Employment devotes its entire energy and resources to attacking the Labour party. The Conservative party has ceased to be a party of Government and has become a party of Opposition. The Prime Minister must be the first British political leader in history to have gone into opposition while still residing in Downing street.

What have the Government tried to tell us today? The Secretary of State tried to tell us that the Fabian Society condemned the minimum wage. I quote what the author of the pamphlet involved, Mr. Fred Baylis, said to *The Independent*. After complaining about persistent misrepresentation by the Secretary of State, he concluded:

"Despite what Mr. Howard twists my words to suggest, I did not condemn Labour's proposal for a legal minimum wage. I strongly support it."

That is from the man whom the Secretary of State said condemned the minimum wage.

The Secretary of State also said that Labour Members of Parliament condemned the mininimum wage. We asked which Labour Members of Parliament, and he cited my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who then told him that he supported the proposal. We are still waiting for the answer to the question which Labour Members of Parliament are supposed to condemn the minimum wage.

I shall mention one or two items in the Secretary of State's document because I think that some Tory Back Benchers may be interested. It states:

"Norman Willis of the TUC has said 'the level of two thirds male median earnings is an extreme level' *(Financial Times*, 3rd July 1991)."

I have read the *Financial Times* of 3 July 1991, but those words do not appear. In fact, Mr. Willis said:

"the claim by Mr. . . . Howard . . . that Labour's policy would destroy 2m jobs assumed that the wage would be set at some 'extreme level overnight'".

The Secretary of State also cited in support the National Institute for Economic and Social Research. A few days ago *The Guardian* cited comments from Mr. Paul Gregg, the author of a pamphlet. What he said is highly significant and we should have an explanation. Mr. Gregg said:

"I have had officials from the Department of Employment ringing me up quite often. Every time I say what I am saying [on the issue] it's not what comes out at the end."

[Mr. Tony Blair]

It is about time that the Government stopped misrepresenting what people say and started telling the truth. On the Government's claim that it will cost 2 million jobs, the independent Income Data Services said the other day not only that the Government's assumptions were entirely unrealistic, but that the Government's claim were not borne out by the facts. When Income Data Services examined the 120 wage claims, it could find no discernible effects of the type claimed by the Government.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Income Data Services study was not based in any sense on the introduction of a national statutory minimum wage. If the hon. Gentleman does not accept my estimate or the estimates of any of the independent experts who have said how many jobs that it would cost, when will he give us his estimate?

Mr. Blair: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's claims not borne out by the experience in other countries. Many of them, with lower unemployment rates than this country, have a minimum wage. The right hon. and learned Gentleman persists in telling us that a minimum wage will cause job losses.

Of course, the Income Data Services report was not an analysis of a minimum wage, because we do not have one; it was an analysis of where wage levels had been raised far higher proportionately for the lowest-paid than for the higher-paid, with no discernable employment impact and no impact on differentials.

It is not just a matter of the Government opposing Labour's proposals—they now want to abolish even the minimum wage protection, through wages councils, that we have. Not content with opposing minimum wage legislation for some of the lowest paid in our society, they now want to deprive even the people who have the benefit of that protection. Almost 90 years ago, Winston Churchill said in the House that it was necessary to set up the wages councils to prevent the good employer from being undercut by the bad. Those arguments are as valid today as when they were advanced.

The rest of Europe and the United States not only have a minimum wage but are uprating it by more than inflation. They realise what this Government do not—low wages are not the key to economic success. Training, skills and technology are the keys to success in a modern economy.

Let us consider some of the people whom the Government say should not be protected in the way that we believe they should be. The security guard on £1·50 an hour, the hairdresser's assistant on £1 an hour and other people sometimes working for a pittance are the people whom the Government do not want to support and whom they want to keep on low pay.

When the Government attack the minimum wage and our protection for the low paid, we hear little from them about Mr. John Baker, the chief executive of National Power, and his 60 per cent. pay rise or about Mr. Robert Evans of British Gas and Mr. Iain Vallance of British Telecom. Is there not something peculiarly disgusting about those who decry the notion of protection for the lowest paid, yet sit on their hands and do nothing while those in the privatised companies get huge pay rises? *[Interruption.]*

Conservative Members will listen. Have not the Government always opposed every piece of social legislation that has ever been put through the House? Do not they still oppose the European social charter? This is the only country to oppose it. Are not the arguments that we hear about the minimum wage the same arguments the Government used to oppose equal pay legislation in the 1970s? The Conservative party turned its back on the unemployed, and it now turns its back on the low-paid.

Of course the minimum wage must be implemented carefully and of course we cannot set it at too excessive a level, but we will start the process of having a minimum wage. We shall take care, but we shall introduce it, because it is fair and right and because a society that treats its most vulnerable badly is a society not worthy of the name. Labour will create that society, and that is one reason why we shall have a Labour Government.

6.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I should have found all the rhetoric of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) more convincing if, among the many other quotations, it had contained a reference to the OECD report, which was published less than a fortnight ago, about the effects of a minimum wage in France. That report states that it is likely that France's minimum wage has reduced employment levels, especially for youths and the unskilled, and notes that unemployment is particularly prevalent among workers earning at or near the minimum wage.

Mr. Blair: I do not blame the right hon. Gentleman, because he has been badly briefed by the Secretary of State for Employment. That OECD report refers to an earlier report by Mr. Bazen and Mr. Martin which found, first, that there was no adult employment effect and, secondly, that there was no discernible youth unemployment effect in France.

Mr. Newton: The OECD report does not appear to bear the interpretation that the hon. Gentleman places on it. What is more, the OECD specifically suggested that the right way to tackle the problems about which the whole House is concerned is exactly the way in which the Government have been tackling them—by reducing imposts on the low-paid, such as national insurance contributions, as we have done, and by introducing and improving family credit.

The notion that a minimum wage policy of the kind outlined by the hon. Member for Sedgefield will overtake and allow to wither on the vine the benefit known as family credit—a huge improvement on its predecessor, family income supplement—is far-fetched, given that family credit is now worth the equivalent of £2,000 a year to the average person who receives it. If we are told that a minimum wage will raise wages to that sort of amount, by heavens we have probably underestimated the unemployment that will be created.

I have only a few minutes left to speak. I do not particularly complain about that, except to say that I cannot be expected in the time available to respond to all the points made in the debate. At the end of April—the latest date for which figures are available—family credit, already taking well over twice as much money to at least half as many families again as under family income

supplement, went to about 340,000 families, the highest ever number. There are further signs that the numbers helped by that benefit will continue to increase.

Whether one bases one's views on the OECD report or on any other sensible analysis, there can be no doubt that family credit, together with the tax and national insurance policies which have pursued to create employment, is being and will be infinitely more effective in tackling those problems than the Labour party's policies would be.

I have not attempted to go into all the statistical minutiae offered by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), but we heard a lot about training and statistics in Europe. Let me give the hon. Gentleman four facts for him to ponder. If we adopted the approach to pensions which is general in Europe, 2 million women would have no pension. Nowhere but in Britain do married women with no contribution record qualify for a pension in their own right based on their husband's contributions. If we adopted the German approach in caring for the elderly, there would be no special income support regime providing up to £300 a week for more than 200,000 people in residential and nursing care. In Germany, that is held to be the responsibility of relatives.

If we adopted the French approach to child benefit—the hon. Member for Sedgefield is fond of referring to France—2,750,000 families, or 40 per cent. of all families, would get no such benefit. In France, the one-child family does not qualify.

May I tell the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) that, if we followed the French on income support for young people, single able-bodied under-25s would receive no benefit at all. So the next time that the hon. Member for Sedgefield wants to imply that the system works better elsewhere, he should say which system he has in mind and whether he proposes to copy it.

No matter how much statistical smoke is emitted, it is ridiculous for Labour Members to pretend to be bothered about poverty, and preach about a minimum wage that will mean fewer jobs and more unemployment.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 217, Noes 281.

Division No. 198] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*

Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Aliason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ls)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. David Davis.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 252, Noes 217.

Division No. 200] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy

Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its policies which have made possible real increases in expenditure on vital public services including social security, education and health; welcomes the recent recognition by the Social Security Select Committee that real incomes rose across the income scale between 1979 and 1988; and deplores the commitment of Her Majesty's Opposition to a National Minimum Wage which would destroy jobs, thereby reducing opportunities and living standards for up to two million people.

London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

7.25 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): London Regional Transport has a general duty to provide or secure the provision of public passenger transport services for Greater London. It must pay due regard to the current transport needs of Greater London, and to the efficiency, economy and safety of the operation.

Unfortunately, millions of pounds are being lost every year because of fare evasion. It is important that the people who use the system and pay for its services should not suffer the total cost, leaving many others to get away without paying.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman so early in his speech, but he said something interesting. He said that there had been fare evasion every year. Can he give us a run of figures, and tell us how much has been lost each year, going back as far as he wants to go?

Mr. Thorne: I shall come to the current figures later in my speech, and no doubt later in the debate hon. Members will allow me to respond to the questions that arise. I shall do my best to obtain the further information that the hon. Gentleman requests.

According to the annual survey, it has been calculated that no less than £12 million a year is currently being lost on the underground and a further £17 million on the buses. As a direct result of measures recently taken on the underground, fare evasion has been reduced. Nevertheless, the losses are still far too big to be satisfactory. Further measures are therefore needed. That is why the Bill is being introduced. It is similar to the measure passed in 1989, which gave penalty fare powers to British Rail, and whose implementation on the London to Tilbury and Southend line has succeeded in substantially reducing the number of people travelling without tickets.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. Gentleman spoke of millions of pounds being lost through fare evasion. Where does he get those figures? Does he simply get them from London Regional Transport? How were they substantiated? There is not a shred of evidence. The Bill has been before the House several times, and those figures have not been substantiated, yet they keep being repeated. How does the hon. Gentleman know the figures if they are not collected?

Mr. Thorne: There are firms that carry out surveys which have been found to be accurate in the past. It is not possible to state a precise figure, but nevertheless, in general terms, the surveys have been very accurate. I am confident that the figures are correct and are as near accurate as can be arrived at.

Before the measure can be introduced, the Secretary of State must be satisfied on a number of points—adequate staffing, adequacy of ticket machines, arrangements for monitoring defective machines and for ensuring that ticket inspectors are properly trained. The scheme must also be adequately advertised before it is introduced, and there must be disputes and appeals procedures. All these important matters will be carefully and diligently examined by the Secretary of State. It would be wrong to assume that he is uncritical about the standards that must be achieved before he gives his consent.

It is at last possible to produce extremely reliable and effective ticket machines, and they are available at all underground stations: they are available 99·9 per cent. of the time and they will give change. There are never less than two machines at any station and there are many more at busy stations. With this in mind, we can take advantage of modern technology and thereby reduce the volume of evasion and fraud in the system.

It is not possible for tickets to be collected on underground trains in the same way as they are checked on British Rail. The present maximum fare on London Regional Transport is £3·10 and a penalty of £10 in relation to that is appropriate. The penalty on the docklands light railway or the buses is £5. It has been specifically geared to take account of the lower charges on the light railway and on the buses.

Validation of tickets has been a major problem on the docklands light railway, so the system has been replaced so that tickets are now validated on issue—but it has become impossible to check tickets at peak periods because the railway is so busy.

Staff involvement is essential to the success of penalty fares and staff will be fully consulted before implementation. Although fraud has always been a factor, it has greatly increased in recent years. It would be quite wrong to allow those who want to indulge in fraud to get away with it any longer than can be avoided. At the same time, it is important to ensure that genuine travellers who are not trying to evade fares can call in aid an excuse.

A passenger will not be liable to pay a penalty fare if there is no facility available for ticket sale at the station from which he started his journey. If he transfers to London Underground or to the docklands light railway from British Rail, and the British Rail station from which he departed has no facilities for the sale of tickets; and if a notice is displayed at the station from which he started his journey—whether a British Rail, an underground or a docklands light railway station—stating that it is permissible for passengers to travel from that station without a ticket, or if an authorised person in uniform informs the passenger to that effect, he will not be liable to pay the penalty.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman said that inspectors would not collect penalty fares on the docklands light railway because it is so busy and because it gets overcrowded at certain times, but so do many other lines. The Central line to my constituency is immensely overcrowded at rush hour, and so are many other lines. So why will inspectors be on very busy tube lines in the rush hour but not on the docklands light railway? is this discrimination?

Mr. Thorne: The hon. Gentleman seems to have the wrong end of the stick. There are captains, not drivers, on the docklands light railway, and one of the responsibilities of such captains is to check tickets—but they do not do so through busy periods. Checking tickets in the rush hour is always a problem. Passengers are responsible for having

[Mr. Thorne]

their tickets checked when they leave the station, and will therefore be responsible for paying penalty fares when appropriate.

If a person is asked for his ticket or authority by the London Underground or by a docklands light railway authorised official and states that he could not obtain one for one or more of these reasons, it is for the underground or the light railway to prove that that reason is not correct —the onus is on them. If a passenger wants to offer one of these reasons later, he has 21 days from the day of the completion of his journey in which to do so. Only then comes the transfer of the burden of proof. If a passenger does not provide an explanation in these terms on the spot or within 21 days, he has to prove that one of the defences applies. That seems an effective and sensible way to proceed.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was the only Member to approach me about this Bill. He has expressed two anxieties. The first concerns bus services to his constituency, in particular bus routes 38 and 55, which were significantly altered on 24 February last year. The changes were made to improve the reliability of the services. Lea Bridge road suffers from bad traffic congestion, which led to severe disruption of services into the west end. Most passengers using services in Lea Bridge road did so only as far as Islington. Most people using the 38 and 55 bus routes into central London started their journeys in Islington. Only 8 per cent. of travellers used the service from Leyton through to central London.

By changing the structure of the bus network, LRT has been able greatly to improve reliability, which has brought benefits to far more passengers than those affected by having their links broken. Following the changes, Lea Bridge road is served by routes 48 and 56. Route 48 still runs into the city and 56 covers the old 38 route as far as Islington——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me how what he is saying relates to the collection and imposition of penalty fares?

Mr. Thorne: I think that hon. Members have a right to know how their constituencies will be affected by changes in transport facilities, and how penalty fares relate to them. If you feel, Sir, that I am going into too much detail, I shall pass immediately on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, I should like the hon. Gentleman to pass on to the subject of penalty fares.

Mr. Thorne: It is important to introduce this measure as soon as possible to ensure that the fare-paying public are not left making a substantial contribution to providing free transport facilities for those who are defrauding their fellow passengers. A reduction in the amount of fraud will lead directly to a fall in fares for everyone else. I therefore urge the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

7.37 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I listened with rapt attention to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne). I hope that he will now answer the questions that he was unable to answer earlier. I asked him to provide a run of figures on fare evasion. We need to know when the problem first arose and when it assumed the critical proportions which he now describes and which have brought about the introduction of this Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) asked an equally pertinent question. On what basis were the figures that appear in the statement on behalf of the promoters—showing that fare evasion is estimated at £12 million a year on the underground and at £17 million a year on the buses—arrived at? I understand that estimates are made of the amount of money not paid in tax—by a fairly hit-and-miss method—and I should like to know the methodology that London Regional Transport employs to arrive at those figures.

The hon. Gentleman has suggested that they are produced by firms of reliable opinion pollsters. If I had decided to evade paying my fare—the House will understand that the thought would not cross my mind in normal circumstances—and I was asked by someone who clearly did not work for LRT whether I was a valid fare payer, I would be stupid to admit that I was not. It may be that the figures given by the Bill's sponsor understate the case, but if the House is to be persuaded of the need for such legislation, it ought to be provided with an accurate assessment of the level of fare evasion and information on how it was arrived at.

I was intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's claim that ticket machines are available 99·9 per cent. of the time. That sounded like a Stalinist electoral turnout figure. Most of us took such claims with a large pinch of salt and we must do the same in respect of the sponsor's statistics. He scarcely bears any resemblance to Stalin, either in terms of his appearance or his ways, but he attempts to employ Stalin's techniques. The hon. Gentleman may have been telling the absolute truth. If so, I wonder why I am so unlucky so often—because I frequently find myself among those who try to use ticket machines during the 0·1 per cent. of the time when they are not working properly.

Incidentally, I recently attempted to travel on the District line from Upton Park, and when I put money into the ticket machine, I received in my change what appeared to be a 50p coin, but which was in fact a 10p piece that one of my constructive and adept constituents had somehow converted. I understand that that happens a lot. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can say what attempts LRT is making to thwart those who doctor coins to use in ticket machines. I relate that fascinating anecdote to illustrate that even machines that work 99·9 per cent. of the time are not always used by people who are honest 99·9 per cent. of the time.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the problems of ticket inspection at peak times, particularly on the docklands light railway. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton asked about ticket inspection on the Central line, which passes through his constituency. We in Newham dream about travelling on the Central line in the style that one can from Leyton. One can well imagine how crowded the trains are by the time that they reach Stratford. When the Central line is working well, it works very well and provides a regular service. However, if trains are cancelled, those remaining in service become very crowded, and that is true on many other London Underground services.

It is futile to suggest that inspectors could operate at peak periods. It is difficult enough to breathe on a tube train during the rush hour. For inspectors to squeeze their way through crowded carriages may prove a very exciting experience for some, but it would be a slow operation—

and I doubt that an inspector could proceed very far along a carriage. In any event, the furore that such an attempt would create would allow many a fare evader to nip off the train before being asked to produce a ticket.

When we have accurate figures on fare evasion and details of the methodology used to calculate them, we can make a better assessment of the need for the Bill. We ought to ask ourselves if there is a high level of fare evasion, why that is so. London has the highest urban transport fares in the world. I would not mind so much if it also had the most efficient urban transportation system, when such high fares would be commensurate with the benefits. However, anyone who uses LRT's buses or tube trains knows that they are not part of the most efficient urban transportation system in the world.

Its shortcomings cannot be blamed on the inefficiency of the staff. I would not want to work on LRT. Every day of the year, irate passengers turn up at bus stops and underground stations to seek out uniformed staff on whom they can expiate their annoyance. It is quite a dangerous job working for LRT, and on behalf of all my right hon. and hon. Friends—including my hon. Friends the Members for Leyton and for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)—I pay tribute to all LRT's hard-working staff, who are badly served by the Government and their own senior management.

When one realises the lack of capital and revenue investment in LRT in recent years, it is clear why its service is so bad. The Minister for Public Transport, for whom I have a lot of time and who has visited my constituency on many occasions, may argue that the Government recently announced various schemes for large-scale capital investment. That is true, and I pay tribute to him for those improvements, but it took the Government a long time to make them. The Government belatedly realised what an appalling mess they had on their hands, particularly in respect of the level of fare evasion. If they are now punching some money into LRT, it is only because they realise what a big issue the capital's public transport system will be in the coming general election. Nevertheless, past years of neglect have contributed to the service's inefficiency.

That inefficiency is another reason why some people are not inclined to pay their fares. Although I could not possibly condone law-breaking, one can understand people growing so annoyed at the awful service that LRT provides that they become determined not to pay their fares. They almost seem to anticipate the Prime Minister's charter of rights, which will apparently allow us to sue everyone who fails to deliver a proper service. I hope that we will also be able to sue the Government for having delivered a crappy service to the country as a whole, but I will let that pass.

It appears that people are taking the law into their own hands and saying, "If London Regional Transport treats me so badly on a regular basis, why the hell should I pay my fare? If I can get out of this system without putting a penny piece into it, that is exactly what I shall do." When, in the past, Londoners had to pay a levy anyway, they could also say, "I am already making a contribution, so why should I also have to pay inflated fares?" The reasons for fare evasion can sometimes be fairly sophisticated. It is not always a case of someone wanting literally a free ride.

We must give consideration to changing to a flat-fare system, such as operates in most of Europe, whereby travellers could purchase books of tickets at newsagents or kiosks, as they can in Paris. That is the kind of system that the Greater London council tried to pioneer all those years ago. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, remember the GLC. It is soon to re-emerge as the Greater London authority—though I hasten to add that it will be not the son of GLC, but a completely new, slimline body, as members of my Front Bench constantly remind everyone. When the GLC ran London's transport system, it thought that a flat-fare system was needed.

Some argue that the best way of defeating fare evasion is to provide a free transport system. That makes a great deal of sense, because the more people one can get to use a public transport system, who therefore do not use their private vehicles on the roads, the better the industry and commerce of a city can operate.

I am convinced that, if one were to go into the social cost of accounting for a genuinely free fare system in London, one would find that it would benefit everyone enormously in economic and social terms. Although I do not expect the Government to go for such a system, I hope that one day when we have a progressive Government, with a Department of Transport led by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East, we shall think in terms of having a free fare system.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Banks: I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Snape: I do not need promotion to the Privy Council. If one of the terms of my employment as Secretary of State for Transport were that I should introduce free travel in London, I would regretfully have to decline the post.

Mr. Banks: If travel were free, it would not make any difference whether my hon. Friend declined or accepted. There would be no deprivation.

I thought that my hon. Friend was going to make the valid point that a free fare system would mean the loss of jobs, as the unions have always said it would. However, that should not be so under a good progressive transport policy led by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East, for the simple reason that service would be stressed. That is how other modes of transportation are sold. Airlines are sold by virtue of the fact not that everything is done on a shoestring and a prayer, but that there is good service and there are people to look after the passenger when he gets on the plane. Why should there not be people to look after passengers as they get on to a bus or an underground train, whether or not they have paid the fare? I am assuming that we have a wholly free fare system.

Let us move away from that policy, which is for a future Labour Government to implement. Let us concentrate on fare evasion, although we do not accurately know at what level it occurs. Another reason for it is that there are not enough uniformed staff at stations or on buses to ensure that people pay when they travel. The movement towards one-person-operated trains and buses has exacerbated fare evasion.

There is a recession and many people are unemployed. I have already said, and there is no gainsaying it, that we have the most expensive transportation system in the world. It is not surprising that people fall foul of temptation and save themselves 40p or 50p, not because

[Mr. Banks]

they are natural crooks but because that money can be spent on something else that is just as essential as travelling. I am not condoning that, but I would at least understand the rationale behind it. That problem would not arise if we had low or free fares.

Equally, temptation would not arise if there were more staff around because people would feel that, even if they could not afford the monstrously high fares imposed on LRT by the Government's economic policies and imposed on the traveller by the unfeeling management at 55 Broadway, they would have to pay, because if they did not, their collar would be felt.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: I see that my collar is about to be felt, so I shall give way.

Mr. Freeman: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's cogent argument. I am sure that the House would be grateful if he could explain why, if his main concern is the level of fares, he opposes a measure that will allow LRT to recover more revenue and therefore to reduce the average level of fares.

Mr. Banks: That is a good point. If we knew accurately —we are taking it on say-so at the moment—what the level of fare evasion was, the Minister's argument would be enhanced. If the Minister is saying that the recovery of the full amount lost—the £12 million on the underground and the £17 million on the buses—will be directly applied to the reduction of fares, I can see a point for supporting the Bill. I shall be honest with the Minister, as I hope that he is always honest with me, and say that I am not opposed to the Bill. I object to what has been happening with public transport. If we had done this differently, we might not have those problems. We need to examine the reasons for the level of fare evasion, before we deal with it.

I am trying to pose a few possible ways to make sure that these problems will not arise in future. I have suggested a low flat fare or a free fare system. I am not opposed to the Bill, but the Minister and the hon. Member for Ilford, South owe the House an explanation why LRT feels that it is necessary to introduce the Bill. We are told that it is because of fare evasion, but why is that so prevalent? We need to explore the reasons.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is making some excellent points, but will he turn his mind to the Government's attitude to those they call criminals? Do not the Government have a strange attitude in that they regard people who do not pay their fares as wicked criminals, however much money they have in their pocket or have to live on for a week, yet Gerald Ronson, a crook who was in prison, yesterday shook hands with the Queen Mother at the Royal Opera house? He seems to be acceptable in society and to the establishment, but he is a criminal.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend points out the hypocrisy that surrounds this issue. Yesterday, I asked the Attorney-General a question about the level of white collar crime and I said that I did not think that the Government took it seriously. I was aghast at the picture of the criminal Gerald Ronson shaking hands with the Queen Mother. Did she know that her hand was being shaken by this dasterdly, evil, wicked, wretched man who had robbed decent, honest people of £5 million? I do not know, but I felt for her. It was scandalous.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend may be able to help us by telling us whether Mr. Gerald Ronson had committed another dasterdly crime. Did he pay his fare on the underground on his way to the opera?

Mr. Banks: To judge from Mr. Gerald Ronson's track record, I doubt whether he did, but then I doubt whether he used the underground. He is not the sort of person one bumps into on the Central line with a, "Hello, Gerald, I see that they let you out already." Many of my constituents can be met in such circumstances, but not Mr. Gerald Ronson.

I do not often say this, but my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton has got this slightly wrong. Many of those who go in for fare evasion are not the sort of people I was describing—people at the sharp end of the recession, caught out by the Government's inept and malign economic and social policies. Often, they are fairly affluent. Some people who turn up in court for evading fares are lawyers. That should not surprise any of us, because lawyers are quick to charge and slow to pay. Some well-heeled people practise fare evasion, and most of them probably vote Tory. The offence is not limited to people who cannot afford to pay; those who can clearly refuse to do so. I am all for such people being dealt with in an exemplary way.

The diminution in staffing is one of the most obvious reasons for fare evasion. I regularly travel on the London underground and Network SouthEast and I have a fairly convoluted journey from the House to Forest Gate. When the Jubilee line is extended I shall have a much easier journey because I shall be able to go from Westminster to Stratford and from there to Forest Gate. Often when I arrive at Forest Gate there are no station staff, although it depends on the time at which one travels. All the staff at Forest Gate station are good acquaintances of mine.

There are problems when changing from London Regional Transport to Network SouthEast at stations such as Stratford because of the requirement for people to put their tickets into the machines—the automatic rottweilers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton described them. There are no such machines at Forest Gate and no staff either. In many ways you are encouraging people to evade fares. I do not mean you personally, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you turned up as an inspector on the Central line, I would willingly show you my ticket, with some surprise.

If there is no mechanism for checking tickets on the London underground when people move from the underground to British Rail, it is almost encouraging them not to bother with a ticket because no one will ask for it. When they arrive at Forest Gate, there will be no one there anyway. The hon. Member for Ilford, South should tell us whether LRT plans to put more uniformed staff at stations, especially after about 6 o'clock in the evening, because after that time, one is surprised to see British Rail or LRT inspectors at outlying stations.

I am suggesting methods that LRT could use to minimise fare evasion. LRT is guilty of complicity in its own downfall because its policies, which have been encouraged or demanded by the Government, have led to an easy ride for fare evaders, who aggravate the frustration

of regular travellers. They are frustrated not just because the service does not operate properly, but because they see people evading fares, which makes them feel like mugs. They say, "Why should I pay my fare for this rotten, lousy service when other people are not paying?"

The Bill is worthy of more critical examination. We should not simply accept it from the hon. Member for Ilford, South on behalf of the promoters that this is the way to solve the problem. As good legislators, we must always ask how the situation arose in the first place, who is responsible for it and how will it be dealt with. Rather than dealing with symptoms, we must deal with causes. When we do that, we address the genuine problem rather than its manifestation, which in this instance is fare evasion.

Earlier, I spoke about service levels. I hate one-person-operated buses, which constitute one of the biggest reasons for fare evasion. I have seen people getting on and off at the exit door. What can the bus driver do about that? Does he stop the bus and walk back to the exit door? Of course not. He or she just drives on because one-person-operated buses already cause enough congestion on London's roads without the driver adding to the problem in that way.

I again blame LRT and the Government for their insistence on OPO buses and OPO trains. The same problems do not arise with trains, which is probably why the amount lost on the buses is much higher than the amount lost each year on the underground, even though more people use the underground. The opportunity for fare evasion on the buses is greater because of OPO. When the GLC was responsible for LRT, it warned the Government and LRT about that, but LRT and the Government were determined to have OPO buses.

Travellers do not like OPO buses and the people who travel behind them do not like them either, as anyone who has been stuck behind such a bus in a congested road will testify. The Government are not interested in what the consumer wants, and I do not think that the management of LRT are interested either. If it were, it would not have insisted on OPO buses.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South should explain why fare evasion on buses is so much greater than it is on the underground even though more people use the underground than use the buses. I say that it is because of OPO buses, but if I have got that wrong, I will apologise to the hon. Gentleman and to the Minister. I suspect that, on this occasion at least, I have got it right. London's transportation system is being sold on a low level of service, whereas other transport systems opt for a high level of service. InterCity rightly opts for service. It is expensive, but it is a good way to travel.

The airlines go for service for broke and compete on the basis of the service that they provide. No regular air traveller would be happy to climb the stairs of a Jumbo and find that it was one-person operated. He would not like to be welcomed by the captain who would show him to his seat and come round with a hot towel and a barber's shop and say, "I have to go to the front row now because we are about to take off. If you want something to eat during the journey, come along and have a word with me." We know that that is absurd.

It is mainly working-class people who use London's buses. If business executives used them, there would be waiters and people summoning passengers to their seats. It is probably apocryphal, but it is well rumoured that, when the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) was Secretary of State for Transport, he threw a tantrum on the Central line when he found out that the train did not have a restaurant car. That is the sort of attitude we expect from Ministers, because they are not in touch with reality. They take the view, that since working-class Londoners use buses, one-person operation is suitable, and that if the passengers dodge on and off without paying, what the hell.

On the docklands light railway, the conductors are called captains. I do not know why that term was chosen. We have Captain Soames, although that is probably not a good advertisement for the rank. I was always told that anyone who made only captain in the army was a bit of a failure, but that is another matter. I do not know why the conductors are not called train brigadiers or generals. We could at least do something better for our buses than give the staff fancy names.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton spoke about the many people who use the buses. I use them and I am no toff. *[Interruption.]* Snappy dresser, yes; toff, no.

The docklands light railway is used by many business people. Notwithstanding that it is a new investment, that is one reason why the service is better. There is a class aspect to the Bill and to the proposals that come from the Government. One-person-operated buses are part of the class-based approach to transportation in London. I know that the Minister would hardly agree with me, but my assertion is held to be self-evident on the Opposition Benches. If we were talking about different people, we would be talking about a different service.

If this evening the Minister were to announce that the Government were prepared to reconsider the use of OPO buses, which are condemned throughout London by those who have to use them and by those in other vehicles who have to queue behind them, he would be able to deal with fare evasion at a stroke. I am sure that OPO buses have led to a great deal of alleged fare evasion. We do not know the exact figures, but it would seem that fare evasion on the buses is greater than that on the underground system.

Flat, reasonable fares are wanted. If we had an efficient LRT service and adequate staffing levels on buses and at stations, fare evasion would dwindle to almost nothing and there would be no need for the Bill. I am prepared to support the Bill, but it is an admission of failure by the Government and by LRT. I deplore the fact that it is in front of us. I hope that the Minister will take to heart some of the lessons that I have outlined.

8.11 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): It might be helpful to the House if at this stage I briefly set out the Government's attitude to the Bill, a measure which my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) has described clearly, succinctly and efficiently.

The Government support the Bill, as they have supported London Regional Transport's previous Bills. It is surely right that those who travel on London Transport's services without paying the correct fare should be discouraged from doing so. We have heard that fare evasion is estimated to cost LT about £12 million on the underground system and about £17 million on the buses. I fully accept, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South would, that those figures are estimates. How

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

can we know the figures unless the fares are collected? Nevertheless, the estimates are based upon professional advice, and the total sum is about £29 million—call it £30 million—in lost revenue. That is a huge burden, which has to be carried by honest passengers and by taxpayers, who in this financial year will contribute £722 million in grant to the costs of London Transport.

London Regional Transport already has powers to operate penalty fares under the London Regional Transport Act 1984, and specifically on the docklands light railway under the London Docklands Railways Acts of 1984, 1985 and 1986. As there was some dissatisfaction with the powers, the Government established a working group on penalty fares in May 1986 to review the principles that should apply to penalty fares schemes on public transport and to look at the existing provisions concerning LT services. The Bill has been closely based on the recommendations of the working group. The Bill benefits also from the considerable scrutiny to which the first LRT penalty fares Bill was subjected in another place.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am extremely grateful to the Minister for showing his characteristic courtesy in allowing me to intervene. As someone who represents a constituency about 420 miles north-north-west of the Piccadilly line, I hesitated before intervening. However, I travel occasionally between Heathrow and Westminster underground station by way of the Piccadilly and District lines. On that basis, I ask the Minister whether he is satisfied that the sanctions that will be introduced by way of the Bill will not lead in any way to an increase in instances of assaults upon members of London Regional Transport.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman's constituents, as United Kingdom taxpayers, have an interest in the Bill, because they are subsidising through grant each year the operations of LRT. Therefore, his constituents have a direct interest in ensuring that revenue is maximised.

I should like to reflect on what the hon. Gentleman said and write subsequently. I can tell him, however, that British Rail has powers similar to those that are sought by means of the Bill, and they are using them with the Secretary of State's agreement on the London to Tilbury and Southend service. The evidence that is so far available to me—I shall check it again—is that about 90 per cent. of fare evasion has been eliminated on that service. I am not aware of any evidence of assaults on British Transport police or assaults or acts of violence involving other passengers. I shall check the figures and write to the hon. Gentleman.

The House will know that other Bills with penalty fare provisions have been approved by Parliament and received Royal Assent. I have in mind what was the British Rail (Penalty Fares) Bill and also what were Bills from the South Yorkshire passenger transport executive in respect of the South Yorkshire supertram and from the West Midlands passenger transport executive in respect of the Midland Metro. The House will rightly be concerned to ensure that the principles of a fair and reasonable penalty system are properly reflected in the Bill that is before it and that honest passengers are fully protected.

The promoters will respond to specific comments that are made about the Bill this evening. There will be an opportunity for further consideration in Committee. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South has already said, there is a very important aspect of the penalty fares system which the House should keep in mind, and I ask it to do so. An activating order issued by the Secretary of State for Transport will be required to bring the powers in the Bill into effect, and I must stress that no activating order will be issued unless the scheme that is proposed is fair and workable. It will be for London Transport to convince us of that.

Before any activating order is made, we shall wish to ensure that all the necessary arrangements are in place to operate the scheme and to protect honest passengers from being penalised if no opportunity to buy a ticket has been provided. The Secretary of State will also need to be satisfied that there are adequate publicity arrangements to inform passengers about the rules, and that procedures for disputes and appeals are in place. I understand that some concerns have been expressed by the Transport Users Consultative Committee about how the trial scheme has worked on the London to Tilbury and Southend service, and I shall be interested to read its comments. I understand that, while there are no major problems, the association has suggestions that it claims would enable the operation to be carried out more smoothly.

In addition, the Secretary of State will need to be assured that satisfactory arrangements exist for staffing ticket offices and for monitoring and repairing ticket machines. It will be necessary that he be assured also that ticket inspectors are properly trained to operate the scheme, that they are deployed appropriately and that they have proper identification. One of the great advantages of the scheme—I think that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) will agree with this—is that, on the London-Tilbury-Southend line, British Rail and British Transport police have deployed staff on the trains and at the intermediate stations between the two termini. Rather than have staff standing at ticket gates, and therefore having nothing to do between trains, more staff have been deployed where the passengers are. That is good for safety and for reducing fare evasion.

As I have said, the experience gained from the pilot scheme on British Rail will be taken into account. It would be a curious situation, and one that would be difficult to justify to passengers and to taxpayers, if this latest penalty fares Bill from London Regional Transport were to be blocked when Parliament has approved similar provisions for other operators. Tomorrow, with the hon. Member for Vauxall (Ms. Hoey), I shall be visiting the underground stations of Stockwell and Oval in her constituency. I venture to suggest that, if I were to ask a random sample of tube passengers whether they supported the principle of the Bill, I would find that an overwhelming majority were prepared to do so. Honest passengers are not prepared to pay for the fare dodger, and I hope the House will support the Bill tonight.

8.18 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I too will be brief. The Opposition have traditionally cast a jaundiced eye on penalty fare Bills, particularly those which first came before us five or six years ago. Since then, there have been some signs that British Rail and London Underground management have been more prepared to listen to the views of hon. Members and the trade unions

representing those who are responsible for collecting fares. At least in this Bill passengers travelling without a ticket have up to 21 days to pay the penalty. That is an important move away from the original concept when no ticket meant an on-the-spot fine, which, understandably, led to concerns among those responsible for ticket collection and examination that the sort of situation outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) might arise.

At various times in my railway career, I have collected tickets, and it is not the easiest of jobs on a Saturday night. I listend with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) who entertained us in his customary manner, as he is wont to do. A couple of late Saturday stints at various suburban stations might make him slightly less idealistic—if I can put it that way—about the motivation of some of those who travel on public transport without a ticket.

However, I agree with what my hon. Friend said about the somewhat cavalier attitude to fare collection by the management of London Buses and London Underground in recent years. I feel strongly that, all too often, when these Bills have been introduced, the burden of collecting fares has been placed on either the lowest-paid within the railway industry or those hon. Members who take an interest in these matters.

Dr. Godman: In my observations to the Minister, I failed to say that the tube sevice between Heathrow and Westminster is a disgrace, especially for visitors to the United Kingdom. In his examination of the problem of fare evasion, has my hon. Friend seen any comparative evidence from other systems? I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) will agree that there is little fare evasion on the Glasgow subway system. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) knows, the Glasgow subway system is tiny compared with the London system. It could be put in one corner of the circle line. Nevertheless, there is little or no fare evasion in Glasgow. That may be due to the innate honesty of the Glasgow traveller.

Mr. Snape: That innate honesty is renowned worldwide. I am interested to hear my hon. Friend's experience on the Glasgow underground. It was a Glasgow underground railwayman who once passed on to me the best excuse that he had ever heard for fare evasion. As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Glasgow underground is a small version of the Circle line. When asked why he was travelling with a three-day old ticket, an astute railway passenger claimed that he was waiting to get to the terminus—an excuse that did not go down too well with those responsible for collecting the fare. However, that was before the days of penalty fares.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend is about to entertain us once more, so, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall allow him to do just that.

Mr. Banks: It is sweet of my hon. Friend to say such a nice thing about me. I am glad that my hon. Friend reminded us of his distinguished former career as a ticket collector. I understand that he was a world famous ticket collector; a veritable Pavarotti of ticket collectors. But he is wrong to assume that I do not know the problems of travelling late on Saturday coming back in a carriage full of vomit and empty beer cans, with various yobbos hanging around.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend is a Chelsea supporter.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is right to point out that I am a Chelsea supporter, but that is almost a way of life in my area of east London. I have almost come to love it. Swimming through vomit is another skill that I have acquired during my years in this House. However, the presence of more uniformed officers, British Transport police and underground staff on those trains at that time of night is surely the best way of ensuring that we all travel safely and vomit-free.

Mr. Snape: I think that we would all agree with that. I was merely trying to point out that, both as a booking clerk and as a railway guard—two jobs which, despite what my hon. Friend said, I held with complete lack of distinction throughout my long and undistinguished railway career—I was probably more apt to come into contact with the sort of undesirable characters that my hon. Friend mentioned than I would have been had I been the assistant general secretary of the Association of Broadcasting and Allied Staffs, which I think was one of my hon. Friend's more distinguished earlier occupations.

Before I was so politely interrupted, I was talking about the cavalier attitude of London Underground and London Buses management to fare collection. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West mentioned the difficulties of the one-person operation of buses. There is no doubt that the fact that Britain's transport systems, particularly those in London, have fallen into the hands of accountants rather than operators has led to the sort of decline in service about which he and other hon. Members frequently complain. The ability to balance budgets, although it is not practised by London Underground management in particular at present, appears to be of far more value and importance when it comes to installing people in top jobs than the ability to properly run a transport system.

Twice before during debates on the Bill—I said that London Underground has tried to introduce a similar Bill—hon. Members have regaled us with stories about how difficult it is to purchase a ticket or to hand it in at the completion of a journey when travelling on London Underground late at night. That made me inquire from staff at the sharp end why that should be so. The view among many of those responsible for that job is that the current management of London Underground would rather leave stations unstaffed and ticket barriers wide open than pay the premium payments for the overtime necessary to staff the stations adequately.

We are being asked to pass this legislation without hearing from the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), who represents the promoters, exactly what London Underground is prepared to do to see that adequate staff are provided. He said that, where people transfer from British Rail to London Underground, providing that a board was exhibited saying that it was impossible to purchase a ticket and so on at the commencement of the journey, the penalty fare would not be payable. But that overlooks the reality of late night travel.

If there are any staff at all on stations, whether on British Rail or London Underground, it is usually a small

[Mr. Snape]

number, and if they are called away for any other purpose in connection with their duties and responsibilities, there is often no opportunity to purchase a ticket. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, in those circumstances with no board exhibited, the passengers—the customers, as we are laughably known as these days—are still liable to the penalty payment? If so, Opposition Members will be extremely concerned.

We heard from the hon. Gentleman about the efficiency of London Underground and its new ticket machines, but by all accounts they are not efficient enough to take 50p pieces, and about £250,000—one of the rough estimates given in these circumstances—has already been lost as a result of the passion for such machines. The more adroit non-payers in our society have been clever enough to work out that a coin of another denomination and a piece of silver paper does the job at least as well as, if not better than, the authentic Bank of England 50p piece.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. Clearly, anyone who boards a train without a ticket at an unstaffed station which, however, contains ticket machines will be deemed to be liable for the penalty: he will be told that he should have used one of the machines. What if the machines are not working?

At Forest Gate station, I recently tried desperately to feed a pound note into one of the machines, which simply refused to accept it. I was not prepared to stand there all day feeding a pound note into the machine, which the machine would then return; after all, my train was about to arrive.

Although the ticket was valid, had I got on the train without a ticket I would presumably have been liable for the penalty. What I should like to know—my hon. Friend may not be able to enlighten me, but perhaps he will redirect my question to those who can—is whether the inspectors will accept the fact that a machine was not working as a reason for travelling without a ticket. The fact that 99·9 per cent. of the machines may work will not help the person who happens to have encountered the 0·1 per cent.

Mr. Snape: If my hon. Friend really tried to purchase a ticket with a pound note, I am not surprised that he experienced some difficulty. As far as I am aware, pound notes are no longer legal tender.

Dr. Godman: Except Scottish pound notes.

Mr. Banks: Well, a five-pound note, then.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is beginning to confuse his denominations.

Mr. Banks: Obviously I meant a five-pound note. Inflation had left me breathless. It should have been a one-pound note, but it was a five-pound note.

Mr. Snape: I hope that the Accountant is not listening, and will pay my hon. Friend's salary in the equivalent currency at the end of this month.

Although I would not for a moment cast doubt on the scenario outlined so graphically by my hon. Friend, another scenario strikes me as likely to occur rather more often. The ticket machines of which the hon. Member for Ilford, South spoke in such glowing terms frequently bear the legend "Exact money only". Not long ago, at Euston, eight out of nine or 10 machines bore that legend, and only one appeared to be working. Would declining the opportunity to wait for 15 minutes in a growing queue —including, perhaps, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, waving a pound note—be considered a valid reason for failing to purchase a ticket, and for subsequently refusing to pay the penalty? All too often, a touching faith is displayed in those machines; given the standard of their performance, that faith is generally not merited.

Mr. Cohen: Earlier, my hon. Friend raised a good point about staffing levels on the underground, especially late at night. Could not this be yet another instance of the inadequacy of the fare evasion figures? Much of the evasion probably takes place late at night in unstaffed stations. Unless a good many inspectors are introduced in such stations, violence will increase at such times. London Regional Transport has not thought out the Bill properly: there could be a massive surge of violence.

Mr. Snape: I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West is not sure how the statistics—£12 million a year on the underground and £17 million a year on the buses—were arrived at; I am not sure either, and I do not think anyone else is. By its very nature, quantifying fare evasion is an inexact science. Perhaps the hon. Member for Ilford, South can exercise his customary diligence and thoroughness to give us the answer, and tell us whether my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) is right about the times at which the bulk of fare evasion takes place.

In my view, the Bill is much better than it was. Clause 8 of the statement on behalf of the promoters not only states that the Bill

"has the support of the Department of Transport",

but adds the welcome phrase:

"there has been consultation with the Unions representing those who would have to implement the penalty fares scheme; further discussions will be held if the Bill is enacted."

That is certainly an advance. No such promise was made in respect of earlier Bills, which led to understandable expressions of concern and outrage on the part of those responsible for collecting penalty fares—or, at least, for cautioning the passenger-customer who travels without a ticket.

I hope that the hon. Member for Ilford, South will be able to answer some of our questions. If he cannot do so tonight, I trust that he will ensure that many of the justifiable fears expressed by Opposition Members are answered properly in Committee.

8.35 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Some interesting points have been raised, especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). He made some perceptive remarks—not least that he is a snappy dresser, although he also made it clear that the Bill was a case of the emperor's new clothes. It cannot be justified in any way that will stand up to interrogation.

My hon. Friend also went into the psychology of fare evasion. Of course no hon. Member supports such behaviour, but my hon. Friend contrasted it effectively with the naive simplicity of London Regional Transport that lies behind the Bill. As he pointed out, the level of fare

evasion in this country is the highest in Europe, but he rightly added that we should tackle the causes rather than the symptoms.

My hon. Friend made a good point about one-person operation. He asked why the so-called estimate of the amount of fare evasion was higher for buses than for trains, given that more people travel on trains than on buses and that fares are higher on the underground. He concluded that one-person operation was the reason.

We can extend the psychological argument. An inspector will get on to a bus, fine the individual concerned —shaming him in front of the other passengers—and then leave the bus. The fare evader, however, will remain on the bus, fuming and, perhaps, eventually taking out his anger on the other passengers—or, more likely, on the poor old bus driver. Of course, the same kind of thing could happen on the tube, but that would merely result in more vandalism. On a one-person-operated bus, it might result in violence.

As I said earlier in an intervention on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), London Regional Transport has done no work to establish at what times and in what circumstances fare evasion takes place and who is responsible. I believe that it takes place mostly at night in unmanned stations.

London Transport is keen to cut costs and I suspect that, apart from not wanting to pay overtime, it will not employ inspectors in the first place. Therefore the Bill will have no impact on the level of fare evasion at night. If LT decided to employ those inspectors, many would be needed to collect the fares because I suspect that gangs of youths would travel without paying their fares. If those inspectors confronted such gangs late at night in unmanned stations, I am sure that it would lead to violence.

The Bill has come before the House in the past, and the issue of increased violence has been raised many times by myself and my colleagues. It has always been left unanswered. No work has been done on the Bill from one Session of Parliament to the next. LT may throw up an estimate of fare evasion, but it is unable to provide an estimate of the likelihood of violence.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), who speaks for LT, made a brief speech of 11 minutes in which he offered little justification for the Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks: Disgraceful.

Mr. Cohen: I agree. The only reason why the hon. Member for Ilford, South spoke for 11 minutes was three telling interventions, but each time he failed to come up with an answer. The first intervention came from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, who asked about the trend of fare evasion on the bus and tube over the years. He asked whether it was possible to compare levels of evasion. It is important to know that answer because I believe that there may be a correlation between the level of fares charged and fare evasion. The necessary figures should be produced so that we can make an informed assessment.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the short speech made by the hon. Member for Ilford, South. That reminds me of the occasion when Mr. Canning was asked by someone whether he liked his speech. Mr. Canning replied that that person's speech was short, to which the person replied, "Yes. You know I don't like to be tedious." Mr. Canning replied, "Yes, but it was tedious." I am sure that the hon. Member for Ilford, South would have made a much longer speech had he been allowed to tell us more about the bus route through my hon. Friend's constituency. I know that my hon. Friend wants to be fair and I am sure that he will recall that the hon. Member for Ilford, South was cut off in his veritable prime.

Mr. Cohen: I accept that, but the hon. Member for Ilford, South was not ruled out of order. However, his brief comments on the bus routes were wrong. He said that the No. 38 and No. 55 buses no longer stopped on Lea Bridge road because of traffic congestion. That is the line put out by LT, but when has it been its policy not to run public transport because of traffic congestion? Surely the object is to get cars off heavily congested roads. Surely that means that LT should run more buses on the roads instead of cutting services.

Only yesterday, I received a letter from LT about the Bill, which mentioned the No. 38 and No. 55 buses. Therefore it should be legitimate to mention those routes in this debate. According to LT figures, 8 per cent. of people in the catchment area use those buses to get to central London. That is a heck of a lot of people—it runs into thousands—and they are now denied those routes.

I accept that those bus routes do not represent the central point of the Bill, but my constituents have been treated in a disgracefully shabby way by the Government. LT consulted me about the Bill because it wanted to know whether I would give it decent treatment. I always give such treatment, but how about a bit of decent treatment for my constituents? I asked LT to give them their buses back, but my request was treated in a cursory and derisory fashion.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South made three incredible statements in the first few minutes of his speech after being challenged. First, he said that he did not know the trend of fare evasion and that he knew the current figures only. That was a pretty poor admission, but in some ways it is not the hon. Gentleman's fault. He does this work because——

Mr. Tony Banks: He is paid a lot of money.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman claims that LT does not pay him a lot of money. I believe that he just gets his direct expenses. I think that he is doing the work for a knighthood for services to LT.

We are told that everything comes down to finding money for public services and I have no doubt that it could be found from the salaries of the bosses. However, those bosses could not even be bothered to give the hon. Gentleman a decent briefing. The hon. Gentleman's failure to answer the questions is not his fault, but the fault of those highly paid managers at LT who gave him such a poor briefing.

I should have thought that the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West was obvious and sensible. Surely a sensible person attempting to guess what questions would be asked would have thought of that one. Similarly, I should have thought that my question about the breakdown of LT figures would be anticipated. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Ilford, South was unable to provide the methodology behind those figures. It appears that they are plucked out of the blue.

[Mr. Cohen]

The Minister said that the figures were based on the professional advice received by LT, but I suspect that those figures were provided by LT itself. I remind the House that this is not the first time that such a question has been asked because a Bill of this nature has been before the House on numerous occasions—this is the fifth one. Each Bill is the subject of several debates on several occasions and each time LT has been asked to substantiate the figures for fraud losses. Each time it has failed to provide the answer. All that the hon. Member for Ilford, South could say was that the figures were based on some sort of survey. What survey? Who did that survey? Again, I suspect that it was conducted by LT.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South said that inspectors would not impose penalties on the docklands light railway trains because they are too busy. However, there is enormous overcrowding on the rest of the underground network. If it is all right for inspectors not to impose fines when that line is busy, why are other lines being singled out?

The Minister was not much better briefed than the hon. Member for Ilford, South. He did not seem to know much about the London-Tilbury to Southend line. He said that fare evasion had been reduced by 90 per cent., but he did not know the exact figure. How can he claim that it has been reduced by 90 per cent. when the figures are not known? He failed to say how that figure was arrived at. I suspect that it was plucked out of the air by London Transport. He did not seem to know that that reduction was achieved over only a three-month period. I suspect that it will start to climb again.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is always extremely succinct, logical and clear in his argument, and I have listened to him with much interest. I am sure that the House would like to know whether he opposes the Bill and, if so, on what grounds he does so. So far, he has not disclosed his position or advanced any arguments.

Mr. Cohen: I shall disclose my arguments clearly. I am dealing with the arguments that have been advanced, which is a perfectly legitimate tactic.

The Minister made the interesting point that the collection of penalty fares presents opportunities for new fraud. People will be able to claim to be inspectors and to diddle people out of money. Will authorised inspectors wear a uniform and carry identification? There is absolutely nothing in the Bill about that.

I should like to mention the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is concerned about the Bill but is unable to be here tonight.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), because he and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) are having a meeting in a W Room about the opting-out proposals for Newham. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) knows well, we must split our resources. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South is in the Palace but is dealing with other business. He is as assiduous as ever in passing his views to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton.

Mr. Cohen: The note from his office says that he is unable to make the meeting tonight because he has an important health meeting to attend, but that he may be able to attend later in the evening. He saw me in the Lobby and told me that it was a meeting on an NHS trust and privatisation of health services in Newham, which is of enormous concern. We all know that the Government are about to privatise the buses, but the immediate issue of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South is the health service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South would like to point out that he was unsatisfied with the replies that he received from London Regional Transport to his suggestions. He is not happy with the idea that London Regional Transport will take money from people who have not paid the correct fare—spot fines—instead of taking their names and addresses. He thinks that that will cause trouble and says that London Regional Transport did not give him a satisfactory response when he raised the matter. That is typical of LRT, which has been negligent in responding to issues in the past.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South says that London Regional Transport has no plans to install ticket machines at stations where the booking office may be closed. He feels that it is in its own interest to do that and to provide a machine that produces tickets showing where a passenger boarded in order to prevent fraud. At present, an inspector has no way of knowing where a passenger began his journey. LRT's response to that was unsatisfactory. It is a crucial point, because people who bought tickets at a different station may be accused of fraud, but that point has not been considered by LRT.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South says that when he telephoned London Regional Transport yesterday he was told that the gentleman who knew about the matter would not be in until tomorrow. My hon. Friend said that that shows how much they care about their Bill. That is on a par with how LRT has treated the House tonight and how it has treated the hon. Member for Ilford, South by not giving him a proper briefing to answer basic questions.

LRT could have dealt with the issues that have been raised and Conservative Members would not have had to stay here until 10 pm. However, they know that the payroll vote will ensure the passage of the measure.

LRT's inept management has treated the House, including Conservative Members, with contempt. The Government are being forced to do LRT's dirty work when the problem could have been resolved even without this debate taking place; there are bound to be subsequent debates. Whatever the payroll vote does tonight to force the measure through, we will ensure that the issue is raised in future.

In addition to the ineptitude of LRT's management, the burden of the Bill on Parliament and so on must have resulted in considerable cost to the taxpayer. After all, this is about the fifth time that the measure has come before the House. All that could have been avoided had the management answered our questions and sorted out the various issues. Instead, the Bill has been blocked whenever it has come up for approval.

When I asked the Minister what the cost was, apart from LRT's expenditure on the Bill, I received the reply that I expected, which was that it was nothing to do with him because private Bills were not his responsibility. Did

he really mean to say that all the cuts that he had made were of no consequence? Is he not aware that, when he cuts off the money, services are reduced and fares are increased?

Mr. Freeman: The record should show clearly what is the position this year. I am glad to inform the hon. Gentleman that in 1991-92, the Government have increased the amount of cash grant available to LRT by £50 million. That has occurred in the middle of the financial year. It is a sign of the tremendous support that the Government have given to LRT in difficult financial circumstances.

Mr. Cohen: It is also a sign of the Government's desperation pending the forthcoming general election. The people of London know precisely what a shambles the Government have made of their transport system—how they have neglected it and run it down. The Government are desperate—as they are with unemployment and everything else—and are fiddling the figures, because the bulk of the money that has been put into London Transport has been spent on the Jubilee line. That, too, has been to get the Government out of the mess they have created over docklands by not planning in advance. Office blocks went up, but there was no infrastructure to enable people to get to and from the area. Now the taxpayer is having to pay dearly to create some infrastructure there. It is costing more than would have been the case had there been some planning.

On 6 June this year, the *Financial Times* commented on the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on London Underground, published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office at a price of £24. It said that the report blamed inadequate funding, by successive Governments, for the poor performance of London Underground train services, and it went on to give key figures, on which the Minister should comment, if not today then in due course. The paper said that London Underground, the company which is responsible for the service,

"calculates that, at today's prices, it needs to spend £750 million a year. Of this, £250 million a year is just to halt the further deterioration of existing assets, another £250 million a year is to rectify the consequences of underspending in earlier years, £150 million a year is to increase the capacity of existing lines, and £100 million a year is for safety improvements following King's Cross"

and the death of 31 people in the fire there.

"By comparison, actual investment over the past five years averaged £290 million a year at today's prices."

The *Financial Times* went on to say that, in an attempt to defend the Government's record on investment in London Underground,

"the public transport minister said investment spending would be £442 million this year and more than £500 million in 1991-92"—

as I pointed out, pending the forthcoming election—but still a long way from the £750 million that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission said was needed.

The paper continued:

"These figures include sums for the new Jubilee Line extension. The commission's report for next year's spending is £384 million—barely half what London Underground says it needs."

That gives the lie to the boasting statements that we hear time and again from the Minister about the Government's so-called investment in London Transport. Even the increases that the Government are making, pending the general election, leave LRT a long way short of what is needed to get our underground system into a decent state.

In an endeavour to discover the true cost of the Bill, the Minister having shifted the responsibility to LRT, I took the matter to that quarter. I received a reply on 5 March from the chairman, Mr. Newton, who said—this is the key point:

"It would not, therefore, be possible to give you a clear simple answer to the question you have asked without the expenditure of very considerable time and cost."

He has clearly taken a leaf out of the Minister's book because he cannot state the cost of promoting such Bills. The chairman then gave examples of the cheapest and of the most expensive. He said that the cost of the Jubilee Line Extension (No. 2) Bill is currently £5·7 million. I have asked him for more details about that figure. I asked him at the beginning of April, but I have not yet had a reply about how that money is made up. The Government do not provide a grant for that. The bill is met by Londoners through their fares and through other contributions because money is removed from the poll tax grant to local authorities.

The chairman also stated that the cheapest Bill was that which dealt with the Angel because it went through unopposed. Even so, it probably cost about £75,000. How much has this Bill cost? It has been before the House five times, so one can imagine that it has cost hundreds of thousands of pounds—probably nearly £1 million. It has failed year after year to be passed, because people such as the hon. Member for Ilford, South have not been properly briefed and the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West and other colleagues have not been answered. It is inept management not only to keep the Tories here until late at night, but to incur costs of about £1 million trying to promote the Bill and doing so in such an incompetent fashion.

I now deal with the substance of the Bill because time is short. I met members of the board of London Regional Transport to discuss what it has done to my constituents' buses, but I received no change. I also met members of the board to discuss the unfair levels of fares. Again, they were not interested. I cannot remember many Yiddish words —my parents would know a lot more—but at that meeting the members acted like shysters, which means con men. They enticed me to the meeting on the grounds that they had something to offer. When I got there they had nothing to offer. When I argued reasonably about what was needed to make the Bill acceptable, they turned my ideas down flat. I got the impression that the only reason they wanted to meet me was to get the briefing for the hon. Member for Ilford, South. That was the act of a group of shysters who are also inept.

I spoke to the board about fare levels. The point of trying to implement penalty fares is, allegedly, to tackle fare evasion. I told the board that there was a correlation between the high fares charged and the amount of fare evasion. The board said that there was not—it had not done any research and was not interested, but nevertheless stated that there was no correlation. I suspect that that is why it will not introduce the trends suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West.

We have the highest fares in Europe for what is, incidentally, a deteriorating service. The *Evening Standard* of 22 April stated:

"London gets the worst fare deal in Europe".

The article said:

"London's suffering commuters' crammed into over-crowded trams, Tubes and buses, had their suspicions confirmed today—they get the worst deal in Europe.

[Mr. Cohen]

A new survey reveals that the fares they pay are the highest in Europe—nearly double those in Amsterdam or Frankfurt, almost four times as high as Rome and five times as high as Paris and Athens.

The message will embarrass Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind . . . The average travel-to-work journey in London costs £1·40, according to the figures from the Association of London Authorities. The cost in the next most expensive city, Copenhagen, is £1.18, followed by Dublin, where the average fare sinks to 85p.

At the bottom end of the scale are Rome, 36p, and Paris and Athens on 32p.

London Transport's 'Bargain' season tickets are an even worse deal. At £13·80, its three-zone travel card costs a third more than the next most expensive in Dublin and five and a half times that of Madrid's £2·44.

The average commuter fare in the 10 European cities surveyed is only 71p."

The article went on to quote people's views. The *Evening Standard* always gets Conservative Members to say how disgraceful things are, when in fact the Government are implementing the disgraceful measures.

The Independent, under the headline "London Transport fares the most expensive in the EC", quotes the cost of commuting in Europe. The 10 km journey fares are: Athens, 30p; Paris, 32p; Rome, 36p; Madrid, 49p; Brussels, 65p; Amsterdam, 74p; Frankfurt, 80p; Dublin, 85p; Copenhagen, £1·18p; and London, £1·40p, set against an average fare of 71p. The costs of a weekly 10-journey card are: Madrid, £2·44; Rome, 2·48; Athens, £3; Paris, £3·08; Brussels, £4·06; Copenhagen, £6·98; Frankfurt, £7·36; Amsterdam, £7·40; Dublin, £10·27; and London, £13·80, set against an average of £6·09. London's fares, for a deteriorating service, are shameful. There is a correlation between increasing fare evasion and high fares.

It is not surprising that fares are high. When other London Labour Members and I met the chairman and board of London Regional Transport, the manager of London Underground—which contributes to the high fares—said over the dinner table, "So what? These travellers are all from the A and B1 classes, the highest classes in social surveys. They can afford those fares so we can charge what we like. It is best to charge what we like." The manager was merely reiterating the comments of the LRT chairman, Mr. Newton. At an earlier Prime Minister's Question Time, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition referred to those comments. In effect, the chairman said,

"We are pricing people off the tube. It is already overcrowded. If we can increase prices, we can price people off it."

The statement refers to deterring people from travelling. That is what the fares policy seeks to do. The chairman and board of London Underground do not want poor people to travel on the tube. That is why the fares are so high, and the penalty fares are being introduced to target poor people. It is the old philosophy of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who thinks that the unemployed should get on their bikes. He certainly cannot tell them to get on public transport to go and look for jobs, because they are being priced off by management appointed by the Government. Those managers have paid themselves enormous sums; I shall speak about that issue later.

I have already mentioned the serious point about high fares and penalties causing increased violence. That will occur especially late at night and on one-person-operated buses, which means that the poor old bus driver will bear the brunt of that problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South and I are most unhappy about the arrangements for on-the-spot fines.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend have any background information on fare dodging on Routemasters? The Bill's powers cover all London Regional Transport—rail and buses. London Routemasters are a fleet of 750 conductor-operated buses that are extremely welcome on high density routes. The Bill is based on a number of guesses made by a firm of consultants and paid for by London Regional Transport. That firm had no better way to make those guesses than anyone else but has now earned several thousand pounds as a result of being engaged by London Regional Transport. Is there a difference between fare dodging on one-person-operated buses and on Routemasters? Clearly, conductors have far more scrutiny of whether passengers have paid their fares.

Mr. Cohen: I cannot provide any figures. Those questions were asked when this Bill was before the House in the past, and we should have had answers from the hon. Member for Ilford, South, who speaks on behalf of London Regional Transport.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the Bill has been introduced to continue to facilitate the sacking of conductors and to push on with the introduction of one-person-operated buses. The effects of that policy on fare evasion should have been assessed. I bet anything that, other circumstances being equal, there is less fare evasion on conductor-operated buses, because conductors go around collecting the fares.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a desperate policy to get rid of as many employees as possible, but that it would be cheaper to employ people than buy complicated buses? The ordinary rear-entrance Routemasters are much cheaper than those buses that have doors operated from the front. In general, it would be far better to employ people to prevent fare dodging than support the principle of the Bill, which puts an onus on people to ensure that they have a ticket. In effect, it says that people are guilty if they do not have a ticket and tells them that they can either pay up within 21 days or face court action. Does not my hon. Friend agree that prevention is usually far better than an attempted cure?

Mr. Cohen: The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South makes is absolutely genuine.

One reason I oppose the Bill is because the buses in Leyton that go down the Lea Bridge road were savagely cut and thousands of my constituents were treated in an appalling way. I do not disguise from the House that that is one reason why I oppose the Bill; I want those buses back on the Lea Bridge road and I want the No. 38 to run to central London again.

However, I also oppose the Bill in principle because of the class discrimination that results from it, which was referred to briefly by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West. It will act as a deterrent to stop poor people travelling. If I were to give the Bill a smoother passage, I should want a differentation in the fines imposed on those on income support and those who are hooray

Henries. It is no good the Minister and others implying that, because we oppose the Bill, we are in favour of fare evasion, which is absolute nonsense. There must be proper staffing and fares set at a decent level if we are to reduce fare evasion. Those points must be taken into account.

At the meeting I also said that we should increase the penalty fare for hooray Henrys and those who can afford to pay. I would be happy for the fares to be increased for those who can afford to pay, but there should be a much lower penalty for the poor who are already being penalised with high fares. But my suggestion was rejected out of hand. London Underground wrote me a most cursory response at the last minute, which stated:

"We do not accept your contention that low income groups and the unemployed will be particularly penalised nor will they be targeted as a section of society, as you believe. Therefore, we do not propose to make any changes to the Bill."

That was all it said in response to my point that there should be a differentiation in penalty fares.

Mr. Cryer: What my hon. Friend is saying is surprising in view of the fact that, if cases finish up in a magistrates court, as opposed to the summary jurisdiction that the London Transport board is seeking to obtain from Parliament, the magistrate is bound to take into account the financial circumstances of a defendant. Therefore, it appears that London Transport wants one set of rules for its own application of the measures that is quite different and separate from, and in my view inferior to, the set of rules that apply when someone is prosecuted before a magistrates court. That seems to be an unfair set of double standards.

Mr. Cohen: I absolutely agree—that is where we will find class discrimination. When an inspector goes on a tube or bus and fines someone on the spot, the hooray Henries and the A1 and B1 groups referred to by the chairman of London Underground will pay on the spot. They will take out their credit cards to pay. We do not know whether there are arrangements in the Bill for payment by credit card—that is another question to which there was no answer. It is merely stated that appropriate commercial and financial arrangements will be made, but I bet my bottom dollar that there will be a facility to allow people to pay by credit card and cheque. Those who can afford it will be able to get rid of the fine then and there, if that is what they choose to do, but those without money will not be able to do so and will be put through the mill.

In the statement sent to hon. Members, London Transport states that it wants civil proceedings to be used. It says that the penalty will be payable

"on the spot, or within 21 days but, if the passenger refuses to pay the penalty, the Corporation could and do intend to institute civil, rather than criminal, proceedings for recovery, except in the cases involving flagrant dishonesty when prosecutions will be brought."

All fare evasion could be seen as flagrant dishonesty. What reason is there for the distinction except that poorer people who cannot pay on the spot will be put through the mill of the criminal process.

So much money would not have been spent on adverts telling people to get a ticket, not a criminal record, if that were not the intention. The millions of pounds that were probably spent on those adverts would have gone down the drain otherwise, so it is a safe bet that criminal proceedings and criminal records will be kept for the poor. What follows from that but humiliation before the courts, and even vetting?

The Home Office has published a scrutiny report saying that many more people will be vetted when they apply for jobs. A poor person caught out under these procedures will find later that he cannot get a job. He will be discriminated against because his criminal record will show up, whereas a hooray Henry will have paid up right away with his credit card.

That is discrimination; that is the whiff of hypocrisy referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West. Gerald Ronson gets feted and shakes hands with the Queen, while the Government regard the poor as the worst of all criminals because of some petty offence.

The sums of money involved are crucial. A London underground travel pass costs £2·70 a day from Leytonstone to central London, and the most expensive pass costs £3·10. An unemployed man looking for a job might have to follow the advice of the right hon. Member for Chingford and travel around to try to find a job. Even someone who is not looking for a job is entitled to travel round London and make something of his life rather than letting the gloom of unemployment take it over. Such a man will have to spend £2·70 on a travel pass every day. If he buys five a week, one for every working day, it will cost £13·50.

How does that price compare with benefit rates? The Library tells me that a single person aged 16 to 17 entitled to income support may get either £23·65 or £31·15, depending on his circumstances. Someone aged 18 to 24 will get £31·15, and someone aged 25 or older will get £39·65. That could be all that such people receive, yet they are expected to spend £13·50 on travel passes. More than one third of their weekly income would be spent on fares.

We all know what has happened to poor people in the past year. Extra burdens have been imposed on them by the poll tax, fuel costs and other housing costs—rents have been going through the roof—and inflation has been high. Yet even if they buy cheap tickets, poor people can spend more than one third of their income on fares.

I could give many other examples. Someone of state pension age—which is 60 for women and 65 for men—may get as little as £52 a week to live on. People below pension age receive unemployment benefit of £41·40. So these poor people have to spend on ludicrously high fares a third of the money that they are given to live on. London Regional Transport, and the Minister, and the hon. Member for Ilford, South, and the 100 Members on the payroll vote who will troop through the Lobby tonight, all say how reasonable and justified the Bill is.

They are not prepared to allow a lower fine for the unwaged. They argue that most fare evaders are As and B1s. They do not believe in charging hooray Henries more and imposing a lower penalty on the unemployed and on 16 and 17-year-olds. The unwaged are charged less for entrance to many other events because their economic circumstances are recognised. It is not that LRT and the Government do not recognise these circumstances—they do not care. LRT is increasing fines to price the unwaged off the tubes and the buses.

The chairman of London Underground, Mr. Tunnicliffe, does not only say that all travellers are As and B1s: he wants them to be only As and B1s. He does not want others to be allowed to travel. On-the-spot fines are a facility to enable hooray Henries to get off the hook

[Mr. Cohen]

easily, but they will constitute yet another means of oppression and repression of the poor who dare to travel on our public transport. They are their punishment for daring to do so.

LRT was not afraid to squander about £200 million on the ticket barriers described by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West as automatic rottweilers. LRT does not care about their safety implications. They are fine in places such as Paris, where the stations have wide concourses, but many of the London stations are narrow, so ticket barriers represent an enormous safety risk.

Londoners are fortunate not to have suffered another disaster like King's Cross, but when there is another one —as there will be because of the squalor and under-investment to which I have referred—probably in the next decade, the ticket barriers will contribute to the loss of life. Neither the management nor the Minister cares about that; they hope that they will not be in place when it occurs, so they think it acceptable to employ this risk strategy.

The approach has everything to do with reducing staff numbers. Many stations have no staff after 6 pm, which is when a lot of fare evasion takes place. LRT is desperate to reduce staff numbers and is keen to impose many more cuts to which I shall refer if I have the time. but decent staffing levels might provide the answer. Proper staffing levels would also provide a guarantee of safety for women and other passengers that they do not enjoy now.

Those arguments are at the heart of my opposition to the Bill, and I made them to LRT's representatives when they eventually came to see me. I have a letter in which LRT stated that it would be willing to consult right from the beginning. I asked its representatives to come to see me when they had something to offer and could discuss the matter properly—but they turned up only last week.

Only today, I was given official figures showing that unemployment in Leyton and London has risen 60 per cent. over the past 12 months. Those are the people who will be caught by the Bill. LRT's response to my plea for differential fare levels was this:

"We do not accept your contention that low income groups and the unemployed will be particularly penalised. Nor will they be targeted as a section of society as you believe. Therefore, we do not propose to make any changes to the Bill."

LRT, the Minister, and the hon. Member for Ilford, South —who presented the Bill is such peremptory fashion— behave as though the case for differential fares does not exist, but it does.

Even if the differential that I seek is adopted, it will not solve the underlying problem of high fare levels that force the unwaged off the public transport network. In due course, that aspect will have to be addressed by Ministers. It will not be the Ministers who currently hold office, because the Government's rundown of the public transport system is one reason why they will be thrown out at the next general election. However, their successors will have to tackle the issue of fare and income levels, so that poor people can ride.

When, at the beginning of my remarks, I referred to the comments of other hon. Members, the Minister was quick to rise to his feet to ask when I would get to the heart of my speech. Now he sits quietly, because he is not interested. He does not want to tackle the issue of fare levels being more than half the amount that 16 and 17-year olds receive in income support. It seems that he declines responsibility for fare levels, even though he is the Minister for Public Transport—and the secret hand behind the Bill sponsored by the hon. Member for Ilford, South.

I and my constituents are wondering whether there will be a bus service left on which penalty fares can be applied. I wish that I had more time, because I could say a great deal about deregulation. I have already raised the matter in the House and spoken about the great concerns of many organisations and constituents, who fear that deregulation and privatisation will mean that bus services will be slashed to ribbons. With privatisation, companies will want to go for the profitable routes at profitable times, and other routes will not run.

Recently, I wrote to LRT on behalf of local doctors and asked whether it could send one of the hoppers that it claims make such massive improvements to the new Langthorne health centre where there is great demand. I was told that LRT could not do that. It was not interested in providing a public service. With privatisation, public service will go out of the window. Routes will be run for profit. What use are penalty fares if there are no bus services?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman is being very good about keeping in order, but he is just beginning to stray from the substance of the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I accept that rebuke, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point was that other priorities should be dealt with before the House deals with this Bill.

We are worried that buses will not be operating because of the policies adopted by LRT and the problems that it has not tackled while it has been busy wasting £1 million on the Bill. For example, I have a letter from the leader of Hackney council saying that he is concerned about the Chelsea to Hackney route. Unfortunately, LRT has not drafted a Bill to implement this much-needed route.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South discussed the matter with me briefly and used what I can only call coercion, although it was not from him. He said that LRT would not introduce the Chelsea to Hackney Bill until the penalty fares Bill went through. That argument was used to try to bounce the Bill through. However, LRT has not even drafted the Bill on the Chelsea to Hackney route, let alone put it before the House. So far, it has introduced five Bills, but the one that should have priority has not been introduced. All the established transport and passenger organisations say that such a Bill should have priority even over that for the Jubilee line.

Clearly, the game that the management are up to is trying to bounce through this Bill—which has not been properly thought out or defended and on which it has not briefed the House, or even the hon. Member for Ilford, South—by using the argument that other measures are behind it in the queue and will not be introduced until this Bill is passed. That is scandalous.

Mr. Thorne: The hon. Gentleman is talking a certain amount of rubbish. I discussed the matter with him and explained that, if LRT was losing £29 million a year because of fare evasion, it could not use this money for worthwhile projects such as that which he mentioned. In

the interests of the fare-paying passenger, the sooner that an improved public transport system is introduced, the better.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman makes an argument for London Transport management getting their finger out and solving the problems that have been mentioned by the objectors to the Bill.

The price that I ask is not excessive. I want the No. 38 bus reinstated on the Lea Bridge road/west end route. That is not a great deal to ask. When London Transport cut a bus on the Wandsworth route, the Tories protested and it was reinstated. I want the same treatment for Leyton. Penalty fares should be increased for hooray Henry types and reduced for those who are unemployed or on income support. The intervention by the hon. Member for Ilford, South showed that London Transport should have made a deal and acted reasonably. London Transport came to me last week merely to find out my arguments so that it could brief the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am sorry that I missed a short portion of my hon. Friend's speech. I went outside for some fresh air and someone forced me to drink a pint of beer. I am following his argument, but he should tell the House that he does not object to the Bill simply because of the way in which he was treated about his local bus route. There are objections in principle, but my hon. Friend's present argument might lead him to be accused of opposing the Bill for understandable but not necessarily acceptable reasons. He has advanced a good case—that the Bill should be opposed because of its terms on fare evasion, which attempt merely to address the symptoms.

Mr. Cohen: I hope that someone will force my hand to lift a pint of beer. It is legitimate to raise the issue of the No. 38 bus. The private Bill system is not good, but that is the way it operates.

I do not ask for anything special but for the reinstatement of a London Transport cut. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West said that I should object in principle to the Bill. While he was out, I dealt with that at length. If the Government Whip is willing to waive the 10 o'clock rule, I shall explain it again and raise many more issues. I have spoken in great detail about the level of fares and the treatment of my poorer constituents. They are being treated shabbily and will suffer class discrimination because of the way that the system will operate. They will get criminal records.

The cost of presenting the Bill probably approaches £1 million—certainly more than the £75,000 of the cheapest private Bill. Because LRT management are so inept, they have taken up the time of hon. Members with a Bill that does not deal with a serious potential strike in my area brought about by Government policies on tendering. The Government are provoking a strike and hope to sack workers and disband the trade unions that defend them.

If that happens, there will be no buses on which to impose penalty fares. If there is tendering and private companies provide services, we shall be giving them a blank cheque. Are we giving a cowboy operator the power to impose penalty fares? What commercial and financial arrangements will be made to ensure that the moneys do not go into the cowboy operator's pocket?

The management of London Transport at the Forest Gate branch are trying to force its workers to work longer hours. They are, of course, highly skilled workers. London Transport is good at producing glossy brochures, and I have one of them. It refers to LT's wonderfully skilled drivers. They are even extremely good at collecting fares. The management are trying to force the Forest Gate men to accept a pay freeze and to work up to 20 per cent. more hours.

Management are trying to impose a 48-hour week, which is the maximum that the European social charter states that any employee should work. Of course, the charter is being blocked by the Government. The Secretary of State for Employment wants workers to work even longer hours. It is disgraceful that the Forest Gate management should be asking their employees to accept a pay freeze and to work longer hours. In my opinion there will be a strike. An enormous dispute is building up, and it has been provoked by London Transport.

Mr. Tony Banks: I wish only to underline how skilled the drivers and conductors are, and always have been. Indeed, the Prime Minister was refused a job as a conductor when he applied. Imagine how many better Prime Ministers manqué are now working on the buses.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Prime Minister will have it on his record that he was rejected as a potential conductor and rejected by the electorate, as he will be after the next general election.

Mr. Banks: We shall clip his ticket, do not worry.

Mr. Cohen: The Prime Minister will certainly pay the penalty, if not the fare.

The letters that I have received from a representative of the Transport and General Workers Union about the Forest Gate management and the potential strike will result in questions being tabled. He asks why access was allowed to competitors' tenders. He wants to know why tenders were so low that wages were reduced. What a farce. The Government always proclaim the introduction of competitive tendering, yet in this instance it was a fraud. It was phoney. The result is that the management are seeking to make drivers pay by increasing their working hours by 20 per cent. for no additional pay.

Competitive tendering is a farce when one party is allowed to see the other tenders. Of course a strike is being provoked. The TGWU representative wants to know why management sought to lengthen the working week, and why routes were retained in the absence of a consenting work force. These issues relate to penalty fares. A strike is being provoked, and services will be cut as a consequence.

Threatening letters have been sent to bus drivers in my constituency. Subsequently, the management will bring in hatchet men to reduce services. That will have a consequential effect on penalty fares. The buses will not be there to run. Therefore the estimate that was given is nonsense.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): The hon. Gentleman is clearly scrabbling around for extra material just to fill up the time, so perhaps I can help by asking a question. He and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) have delayed the Bill for up to two years. Has he calculated the cost of that delay and how much it has cost the fare-paying public on London Transport?

Mr. Cohen: I wish that we could cost the delay and that we had some decent figures. If the hon. Gentleman had

[Mr. Cohen]

been here at the start of the debate, indeed throughout the debate, he would know that one of the points that has been made over and over again is that we have not had any decent substantiated figures throughout the Bill's progress.

However, hundreds of my constituents have suffered as a result of the cuts on the 38 and 55 bus routes down the Lea Bridge road. That has been substantiated by the Save our Buses Committee. If London Transport had done a deal on that, whatever costs had been incurred would not have been incurred. The fault lies at the door of inept management appointed by the Government.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) was not here at the beginning of the debate, when pertinent points were being made to the hon. Member for Ilford, South, who spoke on behalf of the promoters. We do not have an accurate figure for fare evasion—that is the whole point—but if we are to use the figures that have been provided in the promoters' explanatory statement in support of the Bill, we must estimate that the two-year delay to the Bill has cost about £58 million—a not inconsiderable amount of money.

Mr. Cohen: If that is the true cost, London Transport could have run my bus down the Lea Bridge road and made the concession for which I asked with millions of pounds in hand. That must be inept management on an enormous scale.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cohen: No, I shall not give way now, because there is only a few minutes to go. I am not scratching around for material. I have tonnes of material. I could go on for another 10 hours.

It is the job of management that should be put out for competitive tendering, not the jobs of those who work on the buses. The chairman's salary increased from £73,286 in 1987-88 to £108,343 in 1989-90, and it rose by a further 25 per cent. to £130,000 a year in 1990-91. But the Minister will not say by how much his salary will be increased next year. If the other privatised industries are anything to go by, he will get another huge whack. The Minister should come clean on what he will pay the chairman.

In 1987-88, 61 members of management received more than £30,000 per year. In 1989-90, it was 366. The number has rocketed and I bet that that trend will continue. The inept management revealed by the Bill has cost millions of pounds. The time of the House has been wasted. Conservative Members who are drifting in now have all had their time wasted tonight by that inept management——

Mr. Thorne *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 190, Noes 60.

Division No. 201] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'lord)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard

Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed and
Mr. David Evans.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boyes, Roland
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Banks and
Mr. Harry Cohen.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 186, Noes 49.

Division No. 202] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Fraser, John
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed and
Mr. David Evans.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Ashton, Joe
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boyes, Roland
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John

Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Rooney, Terence
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Wareing, Robert N.
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Cohen and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that the business motion which comes next on the Order Paper is not debatable but that, if the motion had been taken yesterday and not withdrawn by the Government, we could have debated it for at least an hour yesterday? Are not the Government deliberately gagging Parliament by tabling this motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is correct. The motion is not debatable.

Motion made, and Question put,

That, at this day's sitting, the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill [*Lords*] may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour, and the Motion in the name of Mr. John MacGregor relating to Sittings of the House may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 54.

Division No. 283] **[10·25 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Anderson, Donald
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beggs, Roy
Boyes, Roland
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cox, Tom
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Hoyle, Doug
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*

Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Paul Flynn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

10.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill completed its passage in another place on 17 June. It will enable effect to be given in the law of the United Kingdom to certain provisions of the protocol on inspection incorporated in the treaty on conventional armed forces in europe—the CFE treaty. The Bill has two purposes: first, to create rights of access, entry and inspection for the purpose of conducting challenge inspections under the protocol on inspection and secondly, to confer certain privileges and immunities on inspectors and transport crew members in connection with all inspections under the protocol.

Before turning to the Bill, I will give a brief introduction to the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe and its system for inspections. The CFE treaty was signed at Paris on 19 November 1990 by 22 states, all 16 members of the North Atlantic Alliance, including, of course, the United Kingdom, and a further six states, which were then members of the Warsaw pact, including the Soviet Union. The treaty was negotiated at a time of very great change in central and eastern Europe, and signed shortly after German unification and with the Warsaw pact drawing to a close.

The treaty is part of a process, a stage in the negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe. It is now being followed in Vienna by negotiations to limit manpower—the so-called CFE-1A negotiations, between the same 22 participants. We hope that they can be completed by the time of the Helsinki conference on security and co-operation in Europe follow-up meeting in March next year. Further ahead, we look forward to a new process of dialogue and negotiation after the Helsinki meeting, open to all 35 CSCE members, which will enhance stability and openness in military affairs in Europe. Informal consultations will start in Vienna in September to prepare for that.

The treaty is of necessity detailed and technical. For the purposes of the Bill it is sufficient to note that certain categories of conventional armaments and equipment—battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters—are limited by the treaty. Those are known as treaty-limited equipments—TLEs in the jargon. The limitations apply within the area of application of the treaty, which is the European land area from the Atlantic to the Urals. Each state has to limit and, if necessary, reduce—destroy or convert to other use—its holdings of treaty-limited equipments to specific numbers. The treaty includes detailed provisions on the exchange of information and on verification.

The verification regime is contained in the protocol on inspection, in accordance with which the parties are given

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

specific rights which will enable them to monitor each other's compliance with the provisions of the treaty. The inspection regime is two-pronged.

First, the treaty creates the concept of an object of verification. That means, a military unit or installation at which treaty-limited equipment is regularly present or normally held. They include, for example, regimental and other military headquarters and garrisons, air bases, storage sites, sites where destruction of equipment takes place under the protocol on reductions, and the like. Parties must declare where those are located and what equipment is held there, and must allow inspectors from other parties to visit the sites to check that the information given is correct. At those declared sites, no party is entitled to refuse inspection of objects of verification, except in certain very limited circumstances. In practice, in the United Kingdom, all objects of verification will be Government-owned or controlled.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): What would happen if a treaty partner, the Soviet Union for example, designated an area of Cheltenham that includes GCHQ? Would there be a command inspection of the facilities there? Would that be possible for members of the Red army, before it was possible for Members of this House?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The sort of equipment which comes under the treaty and which I have itemised would not be disclosed at a site of that kind. Of course, it would be open to a Warsaw pact country to carry out a demand inspection at sites in the United Kingdom, and I cannot prejudge what the Government's attitude to that would be. Clause 2(1) gives the Secretary of State discretion over issues of authorisation; it uses the word "may", not "shall", and those words are in the Bill because they form part of the treaty.

We can ensure that access can be given to all objects of verification in the United Kingdom within the time limits and under the conditions prescribed in the treaty, without the need for legislation. Allies with forces stationed in the United Kingdom also will be bound to accept inspections.

The second aspect of the verification regime is the so-called challenge inspection of specified areas. Those provisions mark a new, and very welcome, step in arms control verification. They are designed to give each party the right to inspect any place in another party's territory, whether Government-controlled or not, to ensure that the provisions of the treaty are not being avoided—for example, by the relocation of treaty-limited equipment away from military premises or by the failure to declare all objects of verification.

It is likely that challenge inspections will usually be made at military sites that are not declared sites—that is, those that do not have objects of verification present at them—such as other Government-controlled sites or large industrial warehouses, owned or controlled perhaps by major defence contractors. But the treaty gives inspectors the right to inspect any building or site within the United Kingdom capable of holding treaty-limited equipment, or to demand access to any area to check for the presence of treaty-limited equipment, subject again to certain rights of refusal.

In summary, the essential elements of the challenge inspection regime are: the Government must be able to secure access to any premises or sites within specified areas chosen by the inspecting country; and in practice, under the time limits agreed in the treaty, there will be no time to allow the owner or occupier of premises to argue before a court that his premises should not be inspected.

The Bill is needed to give effect to the United Kingdom's obligations under the CFE treaty in respect of verification teams on our territory. Without it, we should not be able to ratify the treaty, which we hope to do in the autumn.

10.45 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I thank the Under-Secretary of State for his clear explanation of the elements of the Bill, which my right hon. and hon. Friends welcome both for itself and as a sign of progress across the whole spectrum of arms control.

A chapter in arms control ended with the signing on 19 November last year of the conventional forces in Europe treaty. It recognised the end of the cold war and marked a further step in the new east-west security relationship.

We recall that in 1975, when the Helsinki process was established, there existed the two blocs of the east and west, together with the intermediate group of neutral and non-aligned countries. A measure of the changes that have occurred since 1975 is the dissolution of the Warsaw treaty organisation and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and Czechoslovakia and from Poland by the end of next year.

Only 10 years ago, President Brezhnev of the Soviet Union was able, in a quite different world, to boast to his 26th party congress:

"In literally all fields, world socialism"—

as he defined it—

"is advancing steadily."

Today, we find ourselves in a different context. President Gorbachev will shortly seek financial assistance from the G7 countries, Mr. Yeltsin heads the Russian federation, the Baltic states seek their independence and the Warsaw treaty is no more.

It is perhaps a paradox that treaties such as the CFE, which were deemed so necessary in the light of events when they were formulated, are today much less necessary. The rapidity of world change has overtaken the need for them. The world has moved on. Problems that once seemed insuperable, and which lay behind the CFE treaty, are the problems of yesteryear. Today we face new challenges in arms control—particularly that of proliferation, which has attained a new significance at a time when other challenges are being met.

The November 1990 CFE summit was a watershed. Subsequent events served to emphasise that there is no finality or ultimate haven in international affairs—only ports of call that offer a temporary respite before we set sail again.

Since last November, a range of new problems has arisen to pose new challenges in arms control. They include the Gulf war and its consequences—and in only the past few days, we have seen the difficulty of verification in Iraq, with that country's grudging admission that it has sought to develop a nuclear capacity.

The new Germany has come into being, there is an acceleration of the intergovernmental conferences that are to be held later this year, and a debate has begun on the

defence security component for the new Europe. We are witnessing also the resurgence of the old nationalisms in Yugoslavia.

There are encouraging signs in South Africa and China, but, alas, the nuclear facility in Algeria recently spotted by satellite suggests that there is a problem there. We face new hopes and new fears. Finally, within this catalogue of changes since November last year, there are the events in the middle east, the hopes that were raised after the Gulf war, and the dashing of those hopes despite the valiant efforts of Mr. Baker. The middle east remains a major threat to world peace.

As a counter to the argument that the debate has moved on, we can examine the difficulties arising from the details in the treaty since November last year—the manoeuvrings give some idea of the serious issues at stake—and the importance of carefully considering the wording of the schedule to the Bill. The House will be aware of the reasons for the delays since November last year. Differences of interpretation surfaced in two key sectors.

First, there was the Soviet resubordination of over 2,500 tanks, armoured combat vehicles and artillery, combined, to naval coastal defence units, so as to exclude the equipment from the treaty limitation obligations. Of those 2,500 items, 900 were tanks—some 75 per cent. of the tank force size in the British Army now, before the proposed cuts. That shows the strength of the Soviet army. Secondly, in the months preceding the treaty signature, the Soviets transferred 57,000 items from the area of application—the Atlantic—to the Urals, which was against the spirit, if not the letter of the November treaty.

It was encouraging that the USSR found no defenders of those actions among former Warsaw pact countries. After a US compromise proposal was tabled in April, the stalemate was broken and by the end of last month, the issues had finally been resolved, on the basis that the NATO countries would allow the USSR to keep those items assigned to coastal defence units provided that it destroyed an equivalent number of such items within the Atlantic to the Urals area. Furthermore, the USSR agreed to let western inspectors visit those coastal defence units, but the inspection regime will be less thorough than under the terms of the treaty. One understands that this was the result of efforts to achieve a compromise, but it is difficult to see why it should be so in principle. The USSR has agreed to destroy 14,500 of the 57,000 items that were moved east of the Urals.

As the Minister said, the wrangling over the CFE delayed moves to open negotiations on personnel a category ultimately excluded from the CFE to ensure that it was ready for signature at the November summit, which shows that summits impose their own timetables. The CFE-1A personnel negotiations will lead to problems—for example, the dilemma of how to negotiate when it can no longer be bloc to bloc, and how one defines symmetries and parities within the new context, given that some think that these concepts are redundant. It will help the House if the Minister says a little more about the prospects for CFE-1A and the inspection regime.

The first major test of new agreements reached last November has been posed by the internal problems in Yugoslavia. In terms of power bases, the European Community has played a far more significant role than the CSCE. That certainly shows present realities, although in future the CSCE will be able to play a stronger role.

Perhaps the Minister will say more about the strategic arms reduction talks. The United States slowed the pace on START while there were outstanding disputes about CFE. However, in the past month there has been substantial movement on START, which aims to scrap 40 to 50 per cent. of the United States and USSR strategic nuclear arsenals. The treaty will allow each of them 16,000 delivery systems and 6,000 warheads. In the past few days, the press has been full of the visit to Washington on Thursday and Friday of the Soviet Foreign Minister and his team of experts. It is assumed that progress at that meeting will be so rapid that it will pave the way for a super-power summit before the end of the month. On the basis of those press reports, is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office optimistic that the START negotiations will be concluded by the end of the month in time for the summit?

The CFE talks were also meant to trigger SNF negotiations. Some observers claim that full-blown negotiations are unlikely because the Soviet Union has withdrawn its SNF from the former German Democratic Republic and NATO has abandoned the search for a replacement for the Lance missile. All nuclear artillery is also to be phased out. There is an argument about whether SNF negotiations are relevant in this new context. NATO is to produce an SNF mandate by the autumn and it looks as though it wishes SNF negotiations to proceed. In the light of those fundamental changes, is there any reason for the SNF negotiations?

I shall not give a catalogue of other arms control negotiations that are under way on chemical weapons, testing, a partial test ban treaty and biological weapons. Suffice it to say that in the past major obstacles have been placed in the way of negotiations on all those matters. As a result of the co-operation between the super-powers, a new spirit now seems to be abroad, enabling us to look forward to significant progress in each of those areas.

The United States claims that a treaty is possible on chemical weapons by mid-1992, and wants the 39-nation UN disarmament conference to remain in permanent session until a treaty has been signed. One of the key sticking points has been United States and western objections to mandatory challenge inspections. Is the breakthrough in CFE on those inspections relevant to chemical weapons?

There has been rather less progress on the partial test ban treaty. The two super-powers as were have ratified protocols to the threshold test ban treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions treaty which was signed in June last year. The biological and toxic weapons convention of 1972 was the first multilateral arms control treaty. The third review conference on that convention will be held in September and is likely to focus on ways to improve the convention. The biological weapons treaty has no verification provisions. Is the breakthrough on verification in CFE relevant to the biological weapons treaty?

As for arms control in the middle east and the disillusion after the high hopes at the end of the Gulf conflict, we welcome the proposals of President Bush, which he announced on 29 May, aimed at banning chemical and biological weapons, freezing and eventually scrapping the arsenals of ballistic missiles such as Scuds, banning nuclear weapons and ending Israel's production of nuclear material.

We very much favour the proposed United Nations register of arms sales, which should shame the sellers into

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

curbing their appetites for profit and the buyers into reducing their appetites for ever more sophisticated weapons. Perhaps the Minister will comment on arms control in the middle east, which is still the most volatile area of the world. It is the area that is most combustible and the one most likely to lead to armed conflagration.

It is clear that new ground has been broken for verification with the CFE treaty. It is based on the detailed exchange of military information between the parties and, as the Minister has properly underlined, provisions to carry out inspections. The key to the treaty is that it involves reciprocal obligations. Even though we in Britain may find some of the obligations onerous, it is necessary for us fully to comply to ensure that there is corresponding compliance by other treaty partners.

I ask the Minister some questions about the powers of CFE inspectors to have access to premises. Have the Government given any thought to the provision of compensation to private companies that may find that their production process, for example, has been halted as a result of an inspection under the terms of the treaty, and may suffer damage as a result? Is there provision for compensation, financial or otherwise? If there is, what are the Government proposing to do? It is clear that there can be inspections of Government premises and of industry with substantial Government involvement. What guarantees can there be that the provisions of the treaty will not be used for other than military purposes, such as industrial espionage? Are there sufficient guarantees within the terms of the treaty to prevent facilities from being thus misused?

The Opposition accept that the overall scope of the Bill is limited to what is absolutely necessary to comply with the treaty obligations that were entered into in the Paris summit of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in November 1990. We recognise, too, that the implementation of that agreement of last November is potentially of great benefit to European security. We recognise further than the challenge procedures under the terms of the treaty are important in themselves in creating a climate of confidence and are a possible precedent in other areas. As I have said, the challenge inspections which could be implemented for the first time under the treaty, could feed into the chemical weapons treaty. They are therefore a considerable bonus. They could also be relevant in terms of biological weapons.

We are convinced, having read the treaty, that confidence breeds confidence. We look forward to increasing and positive movement across the spectrum of arms control in the months and years ahead.

11.4 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to the Paris summit last autumn. It was probably the height of expectation not only of the arms control process succeeding at long last, but of peace breaking out and a new world order probably being established.

The enthusiasm was somewhat tempered by a number of factors, not the least being the allegations against the Soviet Union of cheating. Between 1989 and 1990 the Soviet Union managed, Paul Daniels style, to lose 77,910 items that hitherto it had declared. That somewhat took the gloss off the existing situation. It meant that the strategic arms reduction treaty would not be signed. Mercifully, the log jam has been broken and trust is being re-established. The bilateral agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States has generally resolved the dispute about whether the Soviet Union was cheating, to the satisfaction of all sides. However, arms control is now seriously back on the agenda. We could never have allowed it simply to wither away.

An important element in arms control is verification and inspection. Indeed, that is a critical and highly controversial element of arms control. Arms control requires trust, particularly between countries that for a generation, and even longer if one wishes to be more historical, have been in a state of semi-war. That trust takes time to establish. It would be naive to assume that one simply accepts in good faith what the other alliance says it will do in a treaty. The lesson of the allegations of Soviet cheating surely confirm that view. It would be equally naive to assume, however effective verification and inspection are, that they are anything more than a panacea, and that somehow establishing a decent inspection regime will remove anxieties and the threats to one's security and the security of one's alliance.

Verification and inspection are important, but they must be seen as a supplement to other approaches to arms control and disarmament. There will still be an important role for satellite reconnaissance and what is euphemistically called national technical means. It is important to have regular and consistent exchanges of data and a much greater transparency of armed forces and society than exists now.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Like me, the hon. Gentleman was a member of a European organisation very much involved in defence, and he will know just how sophisticated satellite reconnaissance is compared with what it was five or 10 years ago. Is he aware that considerable progress is now being made in data gathering via satellites, through the Western European Union and probably also through the hon. Gentleman's North Atlantic organisation, which considerably supports what he, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) have been saying, and that that is to be welcomed?

Mr. George: I am grateful for that intervention. Satellite reconnaissance is important. However, one of the lessons of the Gulf war is that satellite reconnaissance on its own, however sophisticated, is simply inadequate. Anyone who has observed pictures taken by satellite will have seen that they are not sufficient. One knows now the difficulties that the allies had in detecting the extent to which Iraq had succeeded in developing nuclear weapons. Despite all the superior satellite reconnaissance we still appear to have been left very much in the dark about the extent of the Iraqi capability, which is now becoming clear, not so much as a result of satellite reconnaissance as of Iraq's fear that it might be bombed again.

Although there are apparently simple solutions to the problems of inspection and verification, a wide spectrum is appearing. One example is the "open skies" arrangement, and I hope that a treaty will emerge soon.

It is important to have adequate confidence and security building measures, which have long been seen as the poor relation of the arms control process. It is also important to make the observation of military exercises more sophisticated, to establish more conflict prevention centres and, no doubt, to use traditional means—another euphemism, denoting covert activities and spying. Let no one imagine that the KGB, or even its western equivalents, face immediate unemployment.

Let me concentrate for a while on one of that range of methods: inspection. Under the conventional forces in Europe treaty, there are four types of inspection: inspections of declared sites, challenge inspections within specified zones, inspections to witness reductions and inspections to witness what is described as certification. There is no right of refusal for inspections of declared sites, or for certification or reduction inspections. The number of inspections that can be carried out is clearly defined in the CFE treaty and includes challenge inspections, which are our principal concern this evening. Under the treaty, a joint consultative group will be set up to address compliance or circumvention and to resolve ambiguities or differences of interpretation.

We are gaining considerable experience. On-site inspection, and inspection generally, has become a routine part of the arms control process. Following the conference on disarmament in Europe and, in particular, the intermediate nuclear forces treaty, inspection has become institutionalised. On-site inspection is a vital component of the verification of agreements. Shortly, following the CPE treaty, we shall see the introduction of more inspections. In the event of treaties on chemical weapons and strategic arms reduction, there will probably be almost as many people running around each other's countries inspecting as were defending them hitherto.

I do not mean to deprecate the achievements of arms control so far, but there are problems. The process is expensive for both the country that is inspecting and the country that is being inspected; it is costly in terms of both manpower and opportunity costs. To shepherd teams of inspectors, which in turn can split up into sub-groups, requires an enormous amount of organisation. It requires the deployment of people who are skilled in the task of inspection and receiving inspections. It can also be very disruptive; not, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East said, to the company that might be inspected—I suspect that that will not happen, bearing in mind what the Minister said—but to military establishments that will be inspected principally by the Soviet Union.

I suspect, however, that the task facing the Soviet Union will be infinitely more complicated and expensive. The Soviets are likely to be inspected by a range of alliance countries but, because of the disintegration of their alliance, they will have only their own means to inspect other countries—including, I suspect, countries that were formerly members of the alliance that they led.

[Mr. George]

The task of verification and inspection will be difficult in the case of chemical weapons. In order to implement and monitor the intermediate nuclear forces treaty, an on-site inspection agency was established in the United States which had infrastructure establishments that crossed 19 time zones. The CFE treaty is more restricted geographically, but the task will be more complicated than that under the INF treaty because of the larger number of sites where treaty-limited items will be stored.

Inspection must operate according to certain legal principles and a number of goals must be set. One of those must be to provide greater warning time for each alliance. However, one suspects that should any country contemplate aggression it would hardly be likely to take inspectors to sites where those acts of aggression were about to be perpetrated. I do not believe that we should assume that inspection and verification will lead to greater security through their ability to provide a sudden warning of attack. However, inspection is likely to contribute to a greater deterrent effect and confidence building, which are more important than an increased warning time.

The inspection teams must follow certain rules. Those inspections must be sufficiently intrusive to give a reasonable assurance to the inspecting country that cheating is likely to be revealed. More important, that inspection must be sufficiently intrusive to encourage the countries inspected to understand that if they try to pull a fast one, it will be revealed with potentially disasterous consequences. Short-notice inspections are an important means of discouraging cheating.

All inspections must be sufficiently comprehensive, although I accept that they can never take all the sites within their purview. However, it is possible statistically to determine a limited number of inspections, which should be adequate.

It is important to obtain adequate information. The base line data must be extensive and agreed beforehand. Notwithstanding Soviet attempts to evade the CFE treaty, which they were obliged to go back on, many have reached the conclusion that the Soviets have largely complied with their obligations under the INF treaty. They have permitted many of the required inspections.

We must not heap all our hopes of eradicating the Soviet threat on the inspections; the Soviets would be unwise to take a similar view. On-site inspections and inspections in general are merely two of a number of tools that must be used; they are not a panacea. This Bill will be replicated in one form or another by many countries in NATO and the former Warsaw pact. Once the legislation is implemented and the inspectors get to work, that will contribute significantly to a reduction in tensions. Therefore, the Bill must be welcomed by all hon. Members.

11.19 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not seek to emulate the tour d'horizon of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) or the more technical exposition of the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who speaks with much authority on these matters based on his long interest in them and on his long membership of the North Atlantic Assembly.

It is appropriate that we should be debating the Second Reading of the Bill on the occasion of the publication of the White Paper on defence for 1991. The White Paper's central thesis is that the reduction in tension between east and west has reached the stage where it can be asserted with some confidence that we have achieved the end of the cold war. The formal dissolution of the Warsaw pact in the past 10 days serves only to underline the accuracy of that assertion.

I have always believed that arms control and disarmament were most likely to be achieved by the hard bargaining that formed part of treaty negotiation, and that mutual reduction, enforced by treaty, was much more likely to be effective than anything unilateral.

Where I part company to some extent with the hon. Member for Swansea, East is on his suggestion that perhaps the conventional forces in Europe treaty had been superseded by the speedy passage of events since it was first promulgated. It cannot be regarded as something that is now part of history, the necessity for which can no longer be justified. I firmly believe that progress on the strategic arms treaty would not have been achieved but for the conventional forces in Europe treaty. I see the latter, essentially, as the key by which the door to the former can be opened. It is notable that, since the CFE treaty has been recognised and the difficulties eliminated, progress on the strategic arms reduction treaty has been notable—one might almost say breakneck.

These matters are never easy, as we know from the difficulties created by the Soviet Union's attempt to assign certain divisions from the army to the navy. It is wrong to assume that, because the Soviet Union has embarked on a different path from the one that it has followed for 40 years, everything will be sweetness and light, that negotiation will not need to be hard and sometimes abrasive and that verification will not have to be rigorous.

It must also be noted that the treaty that we are discussing creates rights in our favour and, as has been acknowledged, parallel obligations. In discharging those obligations, the United Kingdom and its citizens may be put to inconvenience or indeed to embarrassment. The success of the attempt to limit conventional forces in Europe depends of the mutual obligations in the treaty.

We are entitled to feel some sense of achievement about a treaty that controls conventional forces in Europe, but we cannot allow this occasion to pass without recognising that, as tension in east-west relations appears to have abated, the possibilities for conflict elsewhere in the world appear to have become much more likely. That should cause us soberly to reflect on the fact that, although there may be more comfort among European countries, elsewhere in the world there are still many opportunities for conflict, which are unpredictable and may arise at any time.

We should be grateful for what this treaty achieves, but recognise that it does not provide anything approaching a universal bulwark against conflict or difficulty elsewhere in the world. I hope that the Bill will receive a unanimous Second Reading.

11.25 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) that the Bill, important and welcome as it is, is part of our attempt to seal the armistice in the cold war that has

divided the world so destructively since 1945, and is off focus from the point of view of the real dangers that will confront us in the coming decade.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to confidence breeding confidence. We also know that suspicion deepens suspicion. The true lessons of the Gulf war are yet to be learned. While I happily supported the official Opposition policy throughout that war, we should not be blinded by events to the horrors of that campaign.

It is perhaps a surprise to realise that only 7·4 per cent. of the weapons used were precision weapons and that the great majority missed their targets. It took 27 attempts to hit each bridge in the Gulf war. The remainder were weapons of mass destruction.

The Bill is based on conventional weapons. Unfortunately, the division that we have understood to exist between conventional weapons and chemical, biological and nuclear weapons is no longer clear-cut. The weapons that did maximum damage in the Gulf war had the effect of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. They were the multiple-launch rocket systems, fuel air explosive weapons, cluster bombs and daisy cutters. Their effect was devastation over a huge area. On 30 January, 28 B52 bombers were in the air——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Will the hon. Member refer me to the clause to which he is speaking?

Mr. Flynn: I am speaking to clause 2, Madam Deputy Speaker. This being a Second Reading debate, I was going somewhat wide of the clause.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Enormously wide. I hope that the hon. Member will address his remarks to the clause.

Mr. Flynn: The Bill is all about transparency. The Prime Minister said that the challenge inspections that will take place here are welcome. But they will produce some bizarre situations, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East said, and he referred to the possibility of Mr. Gorbachev asking for inspection of GCHQ. Other such situations could arise. For example, a challenge inspection might be required of Aberporth, a rocket-firing station in west Wales. The Soviet Union could legitimately ask for such an inspection. The facilities there were used recently by General Pinochet, who is still head of the armed forces in his country. Presumably we would allow inspection to take place under clause 2.

But from the point of view of hon. Members, what happens at Aberporth is a secret. Indeed, I received a communication from the Defence Research Agency yesterday saying that it is secret. In other words, welcome agreements—attempts at transparency—are being made throughout Europe, but we in Parliament are not allowed to know matters that can be discovered easily by groups against whom we were ranged for the best part of half a century.

We advance with this important measure from arms control and disarmament, very much on lines agreed at the European summit in Luxembourg. I urge hon. Members not to study the conclusions of the presidency's consultative document, but to direct their attention to annex 7 which deals with the extreme dangers of the over-armament of the world. We may settle the position in Europe and the cold war will end—it is no longer the real threat; the great threat is in the rest of the world, where arms bazaars are selling hideous weapons of mass destruction to any country that can afford to buy them. That will lead to the end of peace in many corners of the world and so threaten a world war. It will lead to instability in huge areas and to the impoverishment of many third-world countries.

The Bill is one building block in the construction of the new world order. We need many more.

11.30 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I shall speak more briefly to this Bill than I did to the previous one, no doubt to the House's delight.

Arms control and disarmament have been off the agenda for far too long, so I welcome the Bill or any measures which put them back on the agenda. They have not been on the agenda because of the Soviet Union's continuing problems with its different populations and because of the involvement of the United States in the Gulf war, but they must again be brought to the forefront of world interests.

The Soviet Union and the western alliance—especially the United States and this country—are still going broke because of their overwhelming commitment to armaments. Of course, the Soviet Union is going broke more quickly, but that also has serious and unpredictable consequences for us. The military could easily take over if we do not reach the agreements outlined in the Bill.

The economies of the west are struggling with recession and debt because they have not agreed on the much-needed disarmament, and also because of their competition against those without such a heavy burden of commitments, especially Japan and Germany. There is an element of immortality involved, because we are wasting money on yet more weapons when that money should be used to deal with the dreadful problems of the third world.

That is a summary of what I want to say about the Bill, but I have some specific questions. The Bill enables inspections to be made in the United Kingdom under the conventional forces in Europe treaty, but that treaty has not yet been ratified by the United Kingdom. Why not? When will we ratify it, and what is the hold-up?

What about the short-range nuclear forces? When will negotiations begin on them? In 1989 NATO promised that they would start as soon as the CFE treaty had been concluded. Can we have some information about when negotiations will start?

When will the Government participate directly in more arms control measures? Only two weeks ago, in answer to a written question, the Prime Minister said that the United Kingdom would not enter the strategic arms reduction talks until significant cuts had been made in United States and Soviet nuclear arsenals and only

"if there had been no significant improvements in defensive capabilities".—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. *512*.]

Perhaps the Minister will explain what the Prime Minister meant. Was he alleging that the Soviet Union is breaching the anti-ballistic missile treaty? If so, he should say that overtly instead of casting aspersions and dropping hints which merely damage the arms control process. He should produce evidence. If he cannot do so now, perhaps he will in Committee.

In a written answer, a Foreign Office Minister said that Britain could not sign the anti-ballistic missile treaty

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

because it was a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. That is a pathetic argument, and for too long it has been used as an excuse for Britain not taking part. I am sure that, if the British Government were willing, the Soviet Union and the United States would be prepared to adapt the treaty to make it multilateral and to include a proper verification regime.

I wish to ask the Minister about a technical matter. What happens if wrong information is given to inspectors? Clause 3(1)(b) rightly makes it an offence wilfully to obstruct any member of the inspection team, but it should also be an offence wilfully to mislead or wilfully to attempt to provide false information to the team. The offence of wilfully misleading would, of course, extend to Governments.

What will the Government do to prevent people from misleading the inspection team? Are they prepared to make it an offence wilfully to mislead? Is the Minister confident that any attempt to mislead will be spotted by the inspectors? If so, he is admitting that inspections work and that we should have more of them and more arms control. If he says that inspections do not work, that emphasises the importance of making it an offence wilfully to mislead the inspection team.

Britain and 139 other states have signed the non-proliferation treaty. It should be given more importance. Although many countries do not have nuclear weapons, they are close to having that capability. What will the Minister do to strengthen the treaty? The British Trident system could be seen as violating it, because it offers evidence that Britain is not undertaking to pursue negotiations in good faith or effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race, as the NPT demands. Trident is dangerously close to violating the NPT. If Britain is not doing its duty, that gives other nations an excuse not to abide by it.

There is a link between testing and the NPT. The final review conference is to take place in 1995, and there is a danger that it will founder if there is no significant ban on nuclear testing. The Government have set their sights firmly against that and have blocked it on every occasion. I hope that they will change their mind.

In 1987, France set up the missile technology control regime. What effort are the Government making to ensure that missile proliferation is controlled?

As for the strategic arms reduction talks—*[Interruption.]* These are the most important issues facing the world at present and they should be at the top of the agenda. They are worth airing so that we can try to make some progress in arms control and disarmament. *The Guardian* yesterday said that the four disputes holding up the START agreement were

"an agreed procedure to inspect missile factories, ways to distinguish new and modified variants of strategic missiles from older models, a formula to reduce the number of warheads on missiles not being dismantled, and an agreed way to encrypt data from test missiles so that both sides can decode it."

Will the Minister throw some light on the extent to which those are holding up the START agreements? As the article said,

"even after the treaty is complete, each side will be able to deploy 9,000 strategic nuclear warheads, which some analysts believe is more than either side had when the talks began."

It would be a disappointing outcome for a major treaty if both sides end up with more missiles than they had at the start of the negotiations.

The Government must put their will behind the Bill so that the conference on security and co-operation in Europe can tackle arms proliferation and the worldwide arms trade. We must have some answers from the Minister to show that the Government have the will to back proper measures for arms control and disarmament.

11.42 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I welcome this important Bill, and I have listened carefully to the Minister's opening remarks. We are fortunate that Parliament has a number of hours in which to examine the issue at our leisure, rather than having the debate curtailed at tea-time to allow hon. Members to go home for a cup of tea and a slice of toast, as proposed in a subsequent motion.

In his opening motion, the Minister kept referring to the Warsaw pact countries, but the Warsaw pact has been disssolved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I said "former" Warsaw pact countries.

Mr. Cryer: The Minister now says "former Warsaw pact countries", but he did not say that during his speech. I point that out as an indication of the Minister's cold war thinking. I hope that the Bill is a new step toward better relations in Europe—by which I do not mean the Common Market but the whole continent of Europe, east and west. I hope that, when he winds up, the Minister will assure us that the Government are not wedded to the idea of the cold war but welcome its dissipation and that they want NATO to be wound up. The cause of tension between east and west could then be brought to an end.

The Bill deals with conventional weapons and is important because many nations in Europe are armed to the teeth and could inflict great damage with conventional weapons. It is also important that we should be able to control conventional weapons so that conflict can never take place, because conflict with conventional weapons is probably a prerequisite for the onslaught of a nuclear exchange, so the two are interlinked. NATO's flexible response policy can roughly be summed up by saying that if they come at us with tanks—it had the Soviet Union in mind—we shall reply with conventional weapons. If they come at us with nuclear weapons, or carry on with conventional weapons and we cannot beat them, we reserve the right to blow up the world by using nuclear weapons. Therefore, the two are closely linked.

I hope that the Government carry out the terms of the legislation, because I am concerned that a number of nations are looking at the Government extremely cynically. They say that, although the Government have signed the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty, they are not honouring it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said, clause 6 commits us to getting rid of nuclear weapons, but we have not done so since the formation of the treaty. The vast majority that signed that treaty are non-nuclear nations, and have told nuclear nations at several review conferences that they are committed not to manufacture or deploy nuclear weapons. However, the nuclear powers continue to increase the numbers of their nuclear weapons. Exceptions to that are

the United States and the Soviet Union, which, through the intermediate nuclear forces treaty, are also nuclear power signatories.

The important nuclear power signatory to the non-proliferation treaty is the United Kingdom. The adoption of Trident nuclear weapons is in breach of the non-proliferation treaty. All the non-nuclear signatories to that treaty have said that they are concerned. A joint statement was not possible at the last review conference because of disagreements over the position of the nuclear signatories to the treaty.

Some of the non-nuclear nations may look at this important legislation, based on the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe, and ask whether the United Kingdom seriously commits itself to a permanent reduction in armed forces and whether it will honour the treaty that it signed, in view of the Government's failure to honour the non-proliferation treaty.

That is not the Government's view. For some extraordinary reason, they believe that getting more nuclear weapons that are more powerful than this country has ever had——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware, as I am, that the Bill deals with conventional weapons. I am sure that he is coming to that point.

Mr. Cryer: At the beginning of my remarks, I mentioned that there is no question in most strategists' minds but that a nuclear conflict will begin with an exchange of conventional weapons. The point that I am making is that, when nations enter into treaties, their conduct in carrying out those obligations qualifies the attitude of nations towards the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe, which the Bill is designed to implement.

Through their handling of the passage of the legislation, and by honouring that important treaty, I want the Government to show that they will carry out its terms. Although I know that the Bill deals with only conventional weapons, there are too many of those and they should be reduced. It seeks to do so by providing the facilities to carry out that treaty, which is important. Failure to implement the United Nations non-proliferation treaty may reveal to other nations the serious nature of this Government's attitude towards the Bill.

Arms control and disarmament, and the inspection of those facilities, are important. We had a recent example in Iraq involving not conventional weapons, but nuclear materials. We are all concerned that no powers should develop nuclear weapons. Inspection is vital to ensure that nations do not exceed their agreed limits on arms of all types, and to see that they move towards reducing their numbers.

Although the treaty is not before us, the Minister said that it lists a certain number of weapons, and that a challenge inspection can be requested by another party to the treaty on sites where those weapons are kept. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) asked the Minister whether he would have to allow an inspection of GCHQ if requested to do so. The Minister shuffled his papers for rather a long time and then said that clause 2 states that the Secretary of State "may" issue an authorisation in respect of such an inspection. Does the treaty actually oblige the Secretary of State to issue an authorisation? In relation to the treaty, does "may" really mean that it is expected and understood that such authorisation will be given?

I am sure that the Minister would not refuse a challenge. The Government want to co-operate with the terms of the treaty to the best of their ability—which brings me to Menwith Hill. It is a communications centre, with a direct link to British civilian communications at Waterstones Tower two or three miles away. About 800 people work at Menwith Hill, even though the site has never been authorised by Parliament—I wish that it had been. The site has been associated with information about the sort of conventional weapons that the Minister says are linked with the legislation through the treaty.

I have no doubt that information about the movement of troops and weaponry and about the storage and disposition of tanks will be recorded—amidst all the other chatter of communications—and analysed at Menwith Hill, where a great many Americans from the National Security Council are employed without the approval of Parliament. In any event, will it be open to a challenging party to demand to see Menwith Hill and what it does, so as to be satisfied that the communications system there is not being used to move various items subject to the treaty from one place to another?

Some signatories to the treaty may become suspicious. Many years ago, the Public Accounts Committee discovered that a base in Cyprus had seemed to have full petrol tanks only because the one that was inspected had been filled from several others, which had been drained. An ingenious system of piping devised by entrepreneurs in the armed forces that linked all the tanks ensured that only one of them needed to be kept full, so that the contents of the others could be sold off.

It is possible that a challenge inspector would say, "You claim that you have 50 tanks at Aldershot barracks, but we believe that the communications system could be used to move some of them for the purposes of an inspection, because you"—that is, the British Government—"want to conceal an increase in your conventional weapons." We might hold the same suspicion about another Government, but we would have the right to issue a similar challenge. There must be some reciprocity.

Will it be within the purview of the challenging parties to enter a secret, hidden base, not authorised by the House —such as that at Menwith hill? If so, I welcome the Bill. The sooner we rid ourselves of the cloak of secrecy that surrounds some aspects of our armed forces—such as the operation at Menwith hill and GCHQ, which is linked to it—the better we will be able to look Iraq, Iran, or any other country in the face and say, "We behave with absolute honesty. We expect you to do likewise. If there has been any chicanery or covering up of information, we expect you to reveal it, because we do likewise under the treaties that we sign."

No lower standard of honesty should be expected, but it is a matter of concern to me, and to many others, that the Government's standards are not—alack, alas—of the highest.

11.56 pm

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Bill has been welcomed by hon. Members in all parts of the House, understandably, because the issue is one of great concern. The debate has at times ranged wide of the Bill, but I hope that my general

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

comments will touch on most of the matters that hon. Members have raised. If I fail to give a satisfactory response in all cases, I will write to the hon. Members concerned with further clarification and details.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) raised a number of questions that went wide of the debate. I will deal first with international considerations, and then with arms limitation in the European context. We welcome the prospect of a START agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. Work is continuing in the alliance to prepare for short-range nuclear forces negotiations.

I remind the House of the proposal by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, on which work continues, for a United Nations arms register. Conventional weapons transfers are a priority and must be carefully considered. We hope for early progress also towards a chemical weapons convention. Discussions among our allies continue, and in those we share the conviction that such a convention must include an effective verification regime.

Within Europe, we are pressing on with conventional arms control. Reference was made to the CFE follow-on negotiations in Vienna, specifically in connection with military manpower in Europe, in which agreement will be reached on national, not bloc-to-bloc limits, as was the case with the CFE treaty. The NATO is preparing a position for consultation among 35 CSCE countries this autumn in Vienna, to prepare for the new process of dialogue and negotiation to begin in mid-1992.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) mentioned open skies, and NATO recently made proposals for the relaunch of this. We await the Soviet response. It is obviously immensely important in the context of the equipment that was withdrawn east of the Urals. I endorse the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the importance of inspection in arms control verifications.

Hon. Members, and in particular the hon. Member for Swansea, East, have asked about compensation. We have to put this point in context. We already have inspections in the public sector interest, for example, for safety at work and for public health. Inevitably, in a complex world, such public inspections are increasing. No compensation is paid for such inspections and a provision for compensation in this process would set an unfortunate precedent. We do not expect that the burden of the inspection regime to be particularly great. Under the rather complex provisions by which we calculate the number of challenges and inspections that can take place, we anticipate that there will be about 10 challenge inspections in the United Kingdom and our European territories each year, and that each one should be no more than 48 hours long.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) asked about requests for inspections. The treaty makes provision for us to protect information in the interests of national security. That also answers a point made by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). The inspection will be of bulky equipment—tanks, armoured carriers, artillery, combat aircraft and helicopters. We are entitled to shroud that equipment so as to deny access to certain sensitive points. The only question that is pursued is the existence of equipment, not the detailed nature of it, which can be disguised by shrouding. It will be up to companies to make adequate arrangements to protect commercially sensitive information. It is important to keep in mind that the verification regime is concerned only about the presence of equipment of the types limited by the treaty.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) raised another point. As I said, the CFE treaty is about equipment of certain types, and all the information that has been given to other parties has been made available to the House.

I sense that the wish of the House is to move on to other matters, so I invite hon. Members to give the Bill a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2

RIGHTS OF ENTRY ETC. FOR PURPOSES OF CHALLENGE INSPECTIONS UNDER THE PROTOCOL

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

12.5 am

Mr. Cryer: I was not clear about the Minister's response on Second Reading. He said that there were reserve powers on the treaty, that areas essential for national security were excluded, and that equipment might be "shrouded", whatever that means. Presumably it means putting a camouflage sheet over a new and secret tank so that inspectors cannot see it. It all sounds terribly childish. The military's childish obsession has cost this country dear in money and human life and limb.

Clause 2(1) states:

"The Secretary of State may issue an authorisation".

For "may", should we read "shall"—or does it mean that there is discretion to refuse a challenge inspection? Clause 2(1) also states that the inspection may be made

"within any specified area in the United Kingdom",

albeit the inspection is made under the protocol.

I hope that, in relation to the important issue of arms control and verification, the legislation will illuminate for other countries any shadowy areas. An important element of such legislation is the building of confidence between nations. People arm themselves when they are suspicious and suspect that other nations may not behave well towards them. The eradication of suspicion is another step towards reducing the amount of arms that people claim, often falsely, that they need for their nation's defence. Will the Minister elaborate on the definition and application of clause 2(1)?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with further information. I am happy to underline the principal point that, in the national interest, the Bill allows us to deny access to sensitive areas. I am not able at this time to say precisely in what circumstances the Secretary of State and other senior members of the Government would seek to exercise that discretion. Clearly, it would be exercised in a matter of great national importance. As I have said, I cannot go into details at this time.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

OFFENCES

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I want the Minister to agree to write to me about offences. I said on Second Reading that there should be an offence of wilfully misleading the inspectorate and asked why it had not been included in the Bill. The clause provides only that someone who

"wilfully obstructs any member of the inspection team . . . shall be guilty of an offence."

The issue that I raised on Second Reading is worthy of consideration, and the Minister did not respond to it. I do not ask him to do so now, but I hope that he will give some thought to the matter and will write to me.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that undertaking.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

12.12 am

Mr. Cryer: We should not allow the Under-Secretary's unsatisfactory responses to go by without comment. The hon. Gentleman employed the formula that Ministers usually adopt when they do not want to answer a plain, straightforward question. In the context of national security, they say that what can and cannot be inspected cannot be defined. However, the Government will be asked about inspections by other members of the treaty and they will have to respond. After all, the Government will be bound to be open. We are discussing future legislation that arises from a treaty that has been signed by the Government and that will provide access to inspect and verify arrangements for the mutual inspection of arms. The mumbo-jumbo that the Minister produced about the national interest not allowing any definition of what can be excluded, for example, is not acceptable, given the changes that have taken place throughout Europe.

At an earlier stage, hon. Members spoke of the cold war and the threat from the Soviet Union. None of us believed in that threat for very long and it has now been proved that it was a hollow one. It was—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may chortle, but the threat has been proved to have been hollow. Many of us, since elected to this place, have been saying that the threat from the Soviet Union was an illusion that was developed by the Conservatives and the military to justify wanton, wasteful expenditure year after year when we should have been spending the money on hospitals, schools and infrastructure. The moneys should not have been wasted on things that we could never have used. Yet it seems that the old hollow attitude is still prevalent.

The Soviet Union is no longer an enemy. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) went to the Soviet Union and said that its leader was a bold, courageous man. She did not stay in office long enough to make further visits to Moscow to sustain the friendship that she developed and, in any event, it was not necessary to do so. After all, we are friends with the Soviet Union now. Indeed, all the eastern bloc countries have changed. We do not need to indulge in the constant repetition of cold-war language or to argue that we must retain our enormous secrets because any indication of their nature to an elected body, such as the House, would prejudice the safety of the United Kingdom. It was not true then and it is not true now.

I hope that the Minister's comments do not show a lacklustre attitude on the part of the Government in the implementation of the treaty, because any treaty that is a step towards reducing our commitment to arms expenditure, towards building up confidence and towards providing verification that we are carrying out our part of the treaty is a step in the right direction. That is why we are supporting the treaty tonight.

12.14 am

Mr. George: I shall not follow the line of argument pursued by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

For many years, people in the Labour party and outside, some more than others, argued vociferously that NATO's figures showing the enormous disparity of conventional forces between NATO and the Warsaw pact were a fiction. I remember the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament producing a document that it subsequently denied it had sent out, arguing that the concept of the Speznatz was a figment of some militarists' imagination. But when the CFE negotiations began, the Soviets honestly put on the table exactly what they had. They admitted that they had lied and, if anything, the discrepancy had been understated.

It is possible to argue that people on both sides played up the cold war for their own advantage and, bearing in mind the evidence available, most people would argue that, looking back for a period, there was a considerable threat. The cold war did exist and it was not exclusively the responsibility of a handful of warmongers on either side. But I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that the situation changed radically. One should put the past in perspective while remembering the agonies that both sets of alliances went through.

If one had to describe the events of the last hour and a half or so the word farce would be inappropriate. The proceedings have been more than farcical. This is a critical Bill, yet party managers on both sides of the House have, for one reason or another, been determined to rattle through this important measure in a short time, late at night, putting pressure on those who wished to speak to be brief—not observed by all, myself included. That shows the House in a bad light.

When it comes to controlling the Executive in defence and foreign affairs, we are probably slightly in advance of the Supreme Soviet before the Gorbachev reforms. Events such as this vindicate the view that we are permanently bypassed. The only defence for such an approach would be if it could be argued that because of the need to implement the CFE treaty the legislation had only a narrow time slot.

Legislation going to the Lords is often perceived as being less important. The House rarely gets it teeth into legislation relating to treaties, arms control, defence—anything that is serious. One can do nothing about this now, but I register the strongest possible protest to the

[Mr. George]

party managers and to my colleagues in the House that we have allowed something as important as this to be dealt with in such a cursory and contemptible manner.

Those who spoke are part of that process. I spoke for 10 minutes, which in itself was a mistake in the light of subsequent speeches. A matter such as this should have been dealt with in great detail, even if it required one, two or three sessions. It is insulting to the House that we cannot raise enough knowledge or enthusiasm to speak in detail about specifics. The Bill is not about START, chemical arms control, open skies or anything mentioned by hon. Members; it is a specific piece of legislation. We did not do it justice. Although that may be partly the fault of Back Benchers, I feel that the bulk of the blame lies with those who decided to rattle through it so quickly. I very much hope that, if we deal with similar legislation in the future, Government and Opposition will decide to give us a little more time, at an earlier hour.

In a couple of weeks, I shall attend a conference of the North Atlantic Assembly. We parliamentarians—well versed in parliamentary scrutiny of the executive, and in parliamentary control of Governments dealing with defence and foreign affairs—will lecture the newly emerging democracies of eastern Europe on how to control the executive. All that I can tell them is, "Please do not follow our example." In their few months' experience of democracy, those countries have probably established more control over their executives than we have established over ours after 700 years of trying.

12.20 am

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: First let me tell the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) that the Bill was debated in another place, given a Second Reading and passed to this House. It was considered non-controversial in the other place, and came to this House—and to tonight's debate—without a single amendment attached to it. That is why the Committee stage was taken so quickly.

We have not "rattled through" the Bill; this has been an open-ended debate. If the hon. Gentleman wanted to debate the Bill in more depth, he and his hon. Friends could have table amendments that could have been discussed in detail. They did not do so. That cannot be the fault of the Government, the business managers or the system that the hon. Gentleman has disparaged; it is the fault of those who scrutinised the Bill. If the people who scrutinised such Bills want to debate them, they can do so. I say that with the greatest respeect, recognising the hon. Gentleman's great knowledge of the subject. I think that he will agree, however, that the Bill—although it touches on the wider arms control debate—is a specific provision within that context, and that the Government are therefore not to be blamed for dealing with Second Reading in rather narrow terms.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred to clause 2. The clause is drafted to reflect the challenge regime, as referred to in the CFE treaty. Where the word "may" applies, rather than the word "shall", it also applies to all the signatories of that treaty—and, presumably, to any legislaton that the Soviet Union may have to implement to give effect to the treaty.

The wording allows an inspected state party to refuse a challenge inspection. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that any Back Bencher in the Soviet Parliament whom he might contact would not find it easy to challenge his Government to give a definition of what the national interest constitutes. It is simply not possible to do that and to receive a sensible, coherent and comprehensive reply.

What I can say is that in practice we would expect to refuse only very rarely, and then only for overriding reasons of national security. It must be important, however, that the right that the treaty confers on all state parties—without which it would not have been completed and signed, and which is not restricted—be retained in the clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Sittings of the House (Select Committee)

12.24 am

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That a Select Committee of fifteen Members be appointed to consider whether the public and private business of the House might be conducted more effectively by making changes to the order and timing of business, the hours of sitting, and the arrangement of the Parliamentary year; and to make recommendations thereon:

That five be the quorum of the Committee:

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place; and to report from time to time:

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference:

That the Committee have leave to confer and meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on procedure of that House for the purposes of deliberating and of examining witnesses on any aspects of the Committee's order of reference which affect that House as well:

That Hilary Armstrong, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Alistair Burt, Sir Peter Emery, Mr. David Harris, Dr. Kim Howells, Mr. Michael Jopling, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Cranley Onslow, Mr. Stanley Orme, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Peter Shore, Mr. Roger Sims and Mr. Michael Stern be members of the Committee:

That the Second Report of the Select Committee on Procedure in Session 1986-87, in the last Parliament, relating to the use of time on the Floor of the House, be referred to the Committee: and

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House until the end of the Parliament.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Before we proceed, I should tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected an amendment, which stands in the name of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), which seeks to leave out

"to adjourn from place to place".

Mr. MacGregor: Some may regard it as somewhat ironic that a motion to set up a Select Committee on the sittings of the House and its hours should begin at this hour of the early morning. Therefore, I shall be brief. If the House approves the motion we will set up a Select Committee which will make recommendations to the House and to which all hon. Members may give evidence. Much of what we will be discussing can be dealt with on many occasions from now on.

When I announced my proposal for the review we had detailed exchanges in the House. I believe that it would be right to say that that proposal commanded widespread welcome on both sides of the House. In my statement of 27 June I made it clear that I believe that, following the consultations I have had with many hon. Members since I became Leader of the House, we need a wide-ranging and in-depth study of the way in which we organise our business.

The House will note that this is a House matter, not a party one. It is important and symbolic that the motion for approval tonight stands in the names of the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) as well as mine.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is some regret that the names set down for membership of the Select Committee do not include any hon. Members from Northern Ireland? We all recognise that Northern Ireland has not been given proper attention in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the difficulty is that there are many in the House with varying points of view who would have wished to be on the Select Committee. I am sure that the hon. Members for Copeland and for Berwick-upon-Tweed have, in common with me, been informed by a number of hon. Members that they would have wished to serve on that Committee. A number have also made that clear tonight. It is difficult to achieve the right balance. It is relevant, however, that all hon. Members will be able to give evidence to the Select Committee and express their views on its recommendations.

It is clear that a number of hon. Members want to speak, so I shall not give way again, but will rather respond at the end of the debate to the points made.

This is not just about the hours that we sit. I hope that the Select Committee will consider the whole way in which we organise the handling of public and private business. In my earlier statement I suggested some of the issues that the Committee could examine. They include the increased quantity and complexity of Government and European business; the increased role of the Select Committees and the new system of scrutiny of European Community legislation. I believe that those European Standing Committees have demonstrated a better scrutiny of European proposed legislation and have helped with the hours of the House. I accept, however, that those Committees will be subject to review.

The Select Committee will also consider the widely differing views of hon. Members. It is also important to stress the input of the Select Committee on Procedure—four members of that Committee are on the new Select Committee. Its report on the use of time on the Floor of the House is referred to specifically in the order of reference for the new Select Committee contained in the motion.

As a result of a number of discussions that I have had with hon. Members on both sides of the House, I believe that the Select Committee should be able to include within its terms of reference the experience of overseas legislatures that follow the Westminster model. It is for the Committee to decide what to do, but several colleagues have impressed upon me the importance of including that overseas experience. That is why I made provision for it in the terms of reference. It is for the House to decide on the amendment tabled by the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), but I believe that it would be a pity if we excluded the experience of other legislatures from the Committee's considerations.

I emphasise that the new Select Committee and the Procedure Select Committee have complementary tasks. The Procedure Select Committee will continue its valuable work on detailed aspects of our procedures under the valuable chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). The new Select Committee must examine private and public business and bring the wealth of its membership's experience and views to bear. I hope that the House will agree that its proposed Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), is one of our most experienced Members, who has long experience of all aspects of the

[Mr. MacGregor]

House. It is important that the Chairman has detailed knowledge of the workings of the House. I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for agreeing to be its chairman and I hope that the House will endorse that.

I believe that the membership of the Committee achieves a balance between hon. Members who have been here a long time and those who have been here for a short time, between male and female Members and between Members from a wide geographical spread of constituencies. That balance is important.

Potentially, the far-reaching nature of the matters that the new Committee can examine is empahsised by the motion's reference to the arrangement of the parliamentary year. The House may welcome a brief explanation of the reference to joint discussion with a Committee of the other place. The simple point is that changes to the parliamentary year, as distinct from all the other matters that the Select Committee will consider, affect both Houses. The new Committee may wish to deliberate with the Procedure Committee of the other place. If the new Select Committee were to make recommendations on the parliamentary year, the Government would have to discuss them fully with the other place. That is why it is important to have that in the terms of reference.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Leader of the House note that many past recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure are relevant to this and should be considered, including the one for a parliamentary calendar based on Canadian experience? Is it not extraordinary that the right hon. Gentleman is still unable to tell us whether the House will rise next week, the week after or the week after that?

Mr. MacGregor: One of my difficulties in making that announcement is that we have much business to complete. I am anxious to ensure that we should not be going through the night every night. I hope that I shall be able to deal with that in business questions on Thursday.

The hon. Gentleman's points are relevant to the motion and relate to the experience of overseas legislatures and to considering changes to the parliamentary year. I agree with him on both points, and I hope that he will agree that the terms of reference cover them. As the motion appears in his name as well, I am sure that he will do so.

Some of the discussions that have been held on the review show that it is important to address the imbalance between men and women in the House. I have made it clear many times that I wish to see many more women Members of Parliament, but I do not think that that is the prime purpose of the Committee. The hours that we work and the way in which we do so are not the main reasons that deter women from standing. They are of equal concern to mere male Members of the House, so I do not regard that as one of the Committee's primary purposes.

I had a meeting this morning with many female prospective parliamentary candidates, who told me that, if constant emphasis is placed on encouraging women Members, it might have the counter-productive effect of encouraging selection committees to think that women experience difficulty in serving in Parliament. That is an important point, but I want to play it down and to make it clear that, although it may help, depending on the recommendations of the Select Committee, more women to serve in the House, it is by no means the primary purpose of the Committee.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): My right hon. Friend knows that I was at the discussion this morning. I support him in the point he is making. Does he agree that the hours and conditions in this place put off many good people, men and women, particularly from outside London and the home counties?

Mr. MacGregor: So it is said, and that is for the Select Committee to consider. I agree with my hon. Friend that the issue does not relate to one sex; it is equal for men and women.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many candidates, men and women, would sign up to work any hours if they thought that would get them elected?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to be diverted from the main issue, although my hon. Friend has a point. Another crucial point is that a number of factors other than the hours we work must be taken into account by anyone wishing to serve here and in the issues involved in the selection of particular people.

The real pressure for this review—the last six months have convinced me that many Members wish the review to take place—is concern, and to an extent, irritation at the frustrations and inefficiencies of the way in which we conduct business. That is the primary issue that the Select Committee must consider. I repeat—it is an important point—that the Select Committee will be able to take evidence widely, including from all Members who wish to give evidence.

The Ibbs reforms of the management of Parliament are an important step in getting the House modernised for the 21st century. A thorough, wide-ranging study of our procedures and the way in which we work is another important aspect of the story. We owe it to ourselves to undertake a wide-ranging review, and that is why I commend the motion to the House.

12.36 am

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Nothing could illustrate more clearly the need to establish a Select Committee to consider the hours of sitting of the House that our presence here now and the fact that we shall be debating until 2 o'clock the setting up of such a Committee.

Earlier, we debated for two hours an important piece of legislation, the Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Bill. The debate began at 10.35 pm and finished at 12.35 am, on a procedure that would have been totally unintelligible to anyone outside the House. We debated the measure in Committee, and on Report and Third Reading, with the Minister expressing surprise that there had not been more discussion of the Bill. There might have been more discussion had the debate commenced at a more sensible hour. I have no doubt that a good case exists for examining the hours we sit and the way in which we conduct our affairs.

There is a predictable routine for those who arrive here as new Members. Indeed, at the beginning they express incredulity, as do many of our constituents, when they realise that we debate issues in the middle of the night—it

is now 12.37—while the nation sleeps. We could easily have had this discussion yesterday morning. New Members go through a period of incredulity. They then get used to the routine, after which they either adjust their lives to the peculiar lifestyle that we must adopt to fall in line with the sittings of the House or they find themselves impotent and frustrated at their inability to achieve change.

The time is ripe for the Select Committee to be appointed and for some changes to be achieved, if only because a large number of Members have recently been elected. There were 156 new Members in 1983 and 128 in 1987 so that, with the addition of by-elections since 1987, over 300 Members—nearly half the House—have been here for fewer than eight years. As the Select Committee may well extend into the next Parliament, and as there will be substantial changes in the membership of the House due to involuntary retirements from the Government Benches after the next general election, there will be a large number of new Members.

The time is ripe for change. Some people say that this place cannot be changed, but I draw the House's attention to the achievements of the Select Committee on Televising the Proceedings of the House. I do so with some pleasure, as I served on that Committee. Four years ago there was massive hostility in the House to the idea of cameras being introduced. That hostility was shared by a great majority of members of the Cabinet and by the then Prime Minister. Now there are eight cameras pointing at us—one assumes that the camera operators are still awake——

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): They are switched off.

Mr. Grocott: I expect that they are switched off. There are cameras and lights, but the heavens have not fallen in. The operation is perfectly satisfactory and is now an unremarkable part of our democratic life. To those who say that this place cannot be changed, I say that the Select Committee proved that it is possible to change it and to do so effectively.

I hope that the Committee that we propose to set up will be bold and will have the nerve to make radical proposals. There are four elements——

Mr. Donald Thompson: Will the hon. Gentleman ask the Committee to consider the fact that, at the Council of Ministers in Europe—where the real decisions are taken —work begins at 10 am? I have stood next to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House at about this time the following morning when he collapsed from overwork, but we were still at it at 4 am the following morning. Real decisions take a long time and discussions cannot be truncated for the benefit of hon. Members with London constituencies who want to nip off home.

Mr. Grocott: I shall gladly deal with the problem of hon. Members from London—an issue about which my feelings are not that dissimilar from those of the hon. Gentleman. However, if he thinks that the Council of Ministers in Brussels is a good model for decision making, his priorities are very different from mine.

Mr. John Greenway: The hon. Gentleman has no experience of it.

Mr. Grocott: We shall not discuss the Council of Ministers. Some of us have seen how ludicrously it operates, including John Silkin when he was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the previous Labour Government.

There are four questions on which I hope that the Committee will concentrate. The first concerns late sittings which do us no credit and are not conducive to good decision making.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): My hon. Friend mentions late sittings and cites this debate. Is he aware that the only reason that we are holding this important and interesting Second Reading debate now is because Conservative Members voted for it and we did not? The usual rules of the House provide that the business draws to a close at 10 pm, following which is a half-hour Adjournment debate. Under instructions from the Whips, Conservative Members voted for an extension of the hours and they can do so whatever the Select Committee recommends.

Mr. Grocott: No one doubts the Government's capacity to control the way in which the House operates. It has ever been thus, but that capacity has been abused by this Government, especially in the past few weeks.

In addition to the question of late sittings, the new Committee should consider the proportion of time spent on the Floor of the House. Many of our constituents have commented on the fact—we have had to make excuses about it since the arrival of the cameras—that there are many occasions when only three or four hon. Members are in the House, yet the whole paraphernalia of the Chamber is required to be kept going. Throughout my political life, I have always adopted the principle that, if I am to address a small meeting, which is frequently the case, I use a small room because it looks much better. It can be argued that many of our proceedings could be dealt with in Committee or in a smaller room than this, and I hope that the Select Committee will consider that.

I hope that the Select Committee will do something about the unpredictability of parliamentary life. We all accept that emergencies may arise and that there are times when a parliamentarian's life must be unpredictable, but it is ridiculous that; as a matter of course, it is not until Thursday that we can make firm commitments in our diaries for the following week. I can think of no good reason for that;, nor can my constituents or those of other hon. Members. It is impossible for us to say whether we are available to attend meetings, because until Thursday we do not know what we will be doing. In most cases, the business could be planned much more in advance.

I wish to come to what most hon. Members regard as the most divisive matter for the Select Committee. I have strong views on it, and it relates to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson). It would be fatuous to deny that there are fundamental differences of view and of interest between those who, like me, live and work away from London and those who live and work in it. Often, it is said that this building has all the characteristics of a club. I would add another description —it has all the characteristics of a London club, in the interests of those who live and work in London. I mean not just Members, but journalists, reasearchers and all the essential support that any Parliament requires. Everything is oriented towards London. That is one of the bad aspects of administration in this country. There would be greater benefits if there were less emphasis on London.

[Mr. Grocott]

The only way to enable hon. Members who do not live in London to conduct their affairs more effectively would be to consider the way in which sittings are spread through the week and, particularly, the problem of Friday sittings. I can see no good reason why the hours spent on Friday sittings could not be spent on other weekday mornings.

Journalists from some newspapers will accuse us of wanting a four-day week, but we all know that, for the vast majority of us, Fridays are constituency days. They offer the only opportunity, outside the recesses, for us to do constituency work and to organise school, factory, office and similar visits. It is a grave embarrassment to all of us when we receive letters on crucial matters involving private legislation which say, "At all costs attend the House of Commons," which means cancelling a raft of constituency engagements. For the life of me, I cannot understand why we cannot either move Friday's work to some time during the rest of the week or arrange that the material considered on a Friday is not subject to a vote.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The hon. Gentleman touched on a point that is dear to the hearts of those of us who do not represent London constituencies. Does not that matter extend beyond the weekly management of business in the House into the parliamentary year? Other legislatures organise their business in such a way that Members can be in their constituencies for a substantial part of each month. It is clear when Members of the European Parliament can go back to their area, organise their routine to meet their constituents and carry out their business. Surely we must organise our business so that it is divided into appropriate sections of each month.

Mr. Grocott: I do not entirely agree with the type of division that the hon. Lady suggests, but I agree that anything that brings more predictability to our parliamentary year and life is to be recommended.

I welcome the setting up of the Select Committee. In many respects we could be accused of putting the cart before the horse, because I can think of no other operation where there would be an investigation into the hours worked before there was a prior investigation into what the organisation was intended to achieve. As well as examining how many hours we should spend performing our functions, we should ask ourselves what our functions are, whether we are performing them effectively, and how effective Parliament is at key functions such as scrutinising the Executive.

Conservative Members will consider this as a deeply partisan point. Perhaps it is, but it is valid. A legislature that was supposed to scrutinise the Executive none the less passed the poll tax Bill, which was manifestly bad, unworkable legislation on any reckoning. It is now recognised as such even by Conservative Members. Could not Parliament have a different system? Obviously, we can never defeat a parliamentary majority and I should never want that, but I wonder whether our procedures guarantee that legislation is properly scrutinised. Is there enough investigation and calling of witnesses to prevent such a fiasco from ever recurring?

The same questions could be asked about our skills to deal with our constituents' grievances—another fundamental characteristic and function of Parliament. It is not so much a question of examining the hours that we work as of examining our functions and how effectively we perform them. One of the lessons I learned on the Select Committee on Televising the Proceedings of the House —many Committee Members did not like learning it—was that the more we asked what the public should see of what we do, the more we were forced to ask how effective we were at doing what we say we do, how good we were at the job and what was the job that we were supposed to do. I am afraid that the answers were often embarrassing, because all too often we are not very good at what we are supposed to do.

If the House of Commons is to retain a central role in democracy, as I am sure most hon. Members want it to, and if our democracy is to be admired throughout the world, we must be prepared to change and admit when we are not doing our job properly. Although I am sure that I shall not agree with all the Select Committee's recommendations, especially if it fails to address the fundamental problem of hon. Members who live and work away from London, I welcome the fact that it is being set up, and I hope that it is a success.

12.53 am

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): At this hour, I shall be brief. I wish to make just three points. First, it is important for people to realise that this Select Committee differs from the ordinary Select Committee on Procedure because it will consider public and private business. We are discussing this matter at this hour today because private business intervened for three hours at 7 o'clock. I wonder whether that was the right way to proceed, with one hon. Member speaking for over an hour. I make no condemnation, but the matter needs to be considered. It is no use our considering the sittings of the House unless we can consider public and private business together.

Secondly, hon. Members' views fall into two definite categories: those who have homes in or around London and are happy to keep business hours, and those who travel long distances to come to the House and would rather sit for long hours three days a week and then not have to be here on Mondays or Fridays. I do not know how we should deal with those conflicting views, but the Committee will have to consider them fully.

The media and hon. Members should not believe that such matters have not been churned over time and time again for many years recently. The concept that we shall arrive at an easy, slick solution that will revolutionise everything is the stuff of "Alice in Wonderland". I am worried that we shall sit for a long time and that the only thing to emerge will be a mouse. Let us heed that warning now, rather than have people going away and expecting the Committee to produce a marvellous answer to everything.

I do not see much point in going around the world. As Select Committee Members can tell us, there are very few legislatures with similarities to ours. Most of the evidence should be taken in writing and presented to the Committee, which should make some sensible recommendations, concerned with the proper working of Parliament, not trying to make the Parliament into something like that in Europe, something like that in Germany and something like that in Switzerland. Those Parliaments are not similar to ours, and we should never believe that they are.

12.57 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I tabled a number of amendments to the motion in the hope that we would have more than an hour and a half to deal with an important Select Committee. The Leader of the House had the cheek to say that he would be brief because many hon. Members wanted to speak—it was he who tabled the motion to limit the debate to one and a half hours. He arranged it so that when we have an hour or so in which to debate the subject yesterday, the motion on the Order Paper was withdrawn.

I tabled a number of amendments because I was not satisfied with the cut-and-dried way in which the matter had been agreed by the coalition of all the parties. When the Leader of the House announced the Select Committee, he announced its chairman. He had no right to do that, but did so because he had reached agreement with everybody and thought he could bypass the procedures and appoint the chairman. But that is a matter for the Committee.

That is why I tabled an amendment suggesting that my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) should be a member. That amendment was not selected, for which I am grateful because my hon. Friend has said that he is not willing to serve on the Committee, and I respect his reservations.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I was interested to see that amendment and when I thought about it during the day I was tempted to vote for it.

Mr. Cryer: I was concerned that the decision about such a matter should be left to the Select Committee members and should not be pre-empted in any way. That is why I suggested my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford, who I believe would have made an excellent Committee member. I am sorry that he decided not to offer his good services, but that is entirely within his jurisdiction.

My amendment suggested that we delete the words:

"to adjourn from place to place"

will, I hope, concentrate our minds. There are enough Select Committees travelling the world from this place at a cost of about £500,000 a year for this Committee to be excluded from that privilege. If the Committee is excluded, I hope that it will concentrate the minds of its members and produce an earlier report. If its members feel that they want a taste of travel, they can ask hon. Members who have visited other countries to come to the Committee to give evidence. They will have a wide choice of candidates.

On Tuesday 26 February, the Liaison Committee provided £35,000 for the Select Committee on Defence to go to Washington; £18,000 for the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts to go to Sweden and Germany; £9,363 for the Select Committee on the Environment to go to Germany; £8,900 for the Select Committee on European Legislation to go to The Hague and £11,900 for it to go to Strasbourg; £36,740 for the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to go to the middle east; £5,655 for the Select Committee on Health to go to Brussels; £9,932 for the Select Committee on Home Affairs to go to France; £29,719 for the Select Committee on Transport to go to the United States and Canada; £29,920 for the Treasury and Civil Service Committee to go to the Soviet Union; and £24,885 for the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs to go to the United States—no doubt to see whether Welsh culture is alive and flourishing there. Such travel is not necessary, and the Committee can well dispense with it.

The hours of other legislatures are known. A massive amount of information is available in the Library. A huge number of hon. Members have been to legislatures all over the world in countries whose climates are better than ours during the winter. They can give evidence to the Select Committee. I hope that we will hear no more nonsense about this travel benefiting the House. I do not often attend meetings of the Liaison Committee, of which I am a member, because they tend to involve long arguments about travel, but I feel that travel with Select Committees is a privilege given because the work of such Committees is an additional chore for Members.

If people claim that my opposition to the rush to curtail or change the hours of this place shows that I am hidebound, I must point out that I voted consistently for televising the House. But I believe that the hours that we have in which to deal with matters that come before the legislature of the United Kingdom are barely adequate. I should have chosen the amendment charging the Committee with considering the arrangements for scrutinising affirmative orders and orders subject to annulment—had I been given the choice.

We deal with them disgracefully. They need more hours of scrutiny, not fewer. Most of the legislation in this place is subordinate, not primary, legislation. I chair a Committee that examines only the technicalities, not the merits, of such measures. If anyone wants to know how difficult it is to table a prayer, he should try opposing a measure subject to the negative procedure. A prayer is allocated time for debate only if Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen table it and the Government agree to it. If the former table too many prayers, the Government will not give them all time.

These orders are not subject to amendment. They are taken complete, in one and a half hours, and it is a fallacy to assume that they can be dealt with in less time than they already are. That is why I have reservations about the rush to set up this Committee.

Against a large parliamentary majority, the Opposition have few weapons to hand. One of them is the power to delay legislation and possibly to build up opposition to it outside—not always successfully, as the poll tax showed —to stop the Government legislating at all. Without the time in which to do that, however, this place becomes a rubber stamp.

I should like to see more socialist women, and men, in this Parliament, but the notion that lots of wonderful people are queueing up to come here if only we altered the hours is wrong. There is already a queue. We all know that, if a Member starts looking ill, and has a good majority, others start discussing the precise size of that majority. A queue of people already wants to get in here, with or without lengthy hours.

The quality of hon. Members varies enormously; the quality of people outside does, too. We represent the strands of humanity among those who send us here, and long may we continue to do so.

I am mindful that the Select Committee has already been sealed and delivered by the Front-Bench representatives of the Opposition and the Government, with the specific purpose of changing the hours of the House. Many

[Mr. Cryer]

more important matters deserve consideration, but I will listen to the debate before deciding whether or not to vote against the motion.

1.4 am

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I commend the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, in bringing forward the proposals contained in the substantive motion to establish the proposed Select Committee. He is turning into an absolutely blooming marvel, and he is likely to be thanked by future generations of Members of Parliament as one of the great reforming Leaders of the House. *[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members may not share my view, but it is worth expressing

I agree with my right hon. Friend that our sitting hours are not a factor in discouraging women from becoming Members of Parliament. However, the general working conditions here, and the general approach that is taken to the business of the House, appears to many outsiders as very old-fashioned, and discourage many good people—male and female—who could serve the House and the country well.

The existing set-up is quite bizarre, and inappropriate in the modern world. We are in danger of allowing ourselves to slide into eccentricity and incompetence. For example, we are only here six months a year—something on which the newspapers have commented a great deal recently—yet we remain debating in this Chamber past midnight. We expect Ministers to work 100 hours a week—week in, week out—and all of us are required to make important decisions, and to vote on them, in the small hours.

The House sits more days per annum than the legislatures of other large democracies. I agree with the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that it is unnecessary to arrange visits to other Parliaments to establish that—it is a matter of record. Nevertheless, we still have trouble cramming in all the business that comes before us.

This House sits more hours, and later into the night, than the other place. No one needs to visit Australia—one only has to walk 200 yards up the Corridor to find out how the Upper House functions.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): How did my hon. Friend reach the conclusion that this House sits only six months a year? That simply is not true.

Mrs. Currie: If my hon. Friend adds up the number of days that the House sits—that information appears in the Select Committee report that was recommended reading for this debate—she will find that they total 172 days a year. The fact remains that we are absent from the House for large chunks of the year—but when we are here, we often sit until well after 1 o'clock in the morning. That may make sense to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), but it does not make sense to me, and I am entitled to say so.

Apart from not having to consider the Finance Bill, the other place does exactly the same work that we do. All Bills are considered on the Floor of the Upper House. It has highly effective Select Committees. It still manages to finish in time for a respectable dinner. Most of their Lordships are pensioners, yet they manage to organise their timetable a lot better than we do. In many respects, they also work more effectively.

I volunteered to serve on the Select Committee, and I will certainly submit evidence to it. I have a long list of suggestions—which grew longer during the two and a half hours taken by the previous debate. For example, the dates of sittings should be known in advance. Details of the business of this House are largely available in advance. Ministers, for example, know when their presence will be required over the next month or so.

The list of right hon. and hon. Members who are to speak in a debate should also be published in advance, as is done in another place. As that information is available in advance to the Chair and to the Whips, why is it kept secret and not published? If it were, we could avoid the immense waste of right hon. and hon. Members' time that occurs when they spend many hours hanging around, not knowing whether they will be called to speak. That may not be a problem for Privy Councillors, but it is for ordinary Members, who are in the majority.

Regular use should be made of timetable motions. I cannot imagine why they should be thought of as a problem. We should work more reasonable hours, and it would not be too difficult to work out how to do that. We can get rid of a great deal of business we do, which is not appropriate for a sovereign House, such as the private Bills on railways and docks, which I have mentioned to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. We should abolish the money resolution and second Adjournment debates.

Mr. Cryer: Why?

Mrs. Currie: The great advantage of abolishing the money resolution debates is that it would cut the hon. Gentleman off in full flood, because he is the only hon. Member who speaks in them. The rest of the House would regard that as beneficial.

We have bitter arguments, as the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said, about the sovereignty of the House, but a minority say that we cannot change the hours because we all have other work to do outside. We cannot have it both ways. Either this House is important or it is not. Either we play macho games at hours when everybody else is in bed, or we engage in the serious business of scrutiny, of criticism, of protest, of praise and of looking after our constituents. There is no longer any reason for our long sittings and our late hours, which make us less rather than more effective. I support the setting up of this Committee. I bid it not to be timid, and I hope that it will reach sensible and intelligent conclusions that will take the House into the next century.

1.11 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) say that we work for only six months of the year and proceed to justify that by talking about 172 days. That would mean that during the six months, the House would be having Saturday and Sunday sittings, no doubt at reasonable hours. That would be unacceptable to me and, I have no doubt, the overwhelming majority of other hon. Members.

Because of fog and other difficulties, I eventually got a plane from my constituency this afternoon, and I sat

beside a constituent who asked me what business I was coming back to. I told him that at about 11 o'clock, I expected to be called in the debate. Given that I have been called some two hours later, that was a triumph of hope over experience. The reaction that I got was no doubt one that other hon. Members have got from their constituents time and time again—disbelief that we might be talking about something important at this time of the morning.

In many walks of life, people have to work late hours and into the night, but people find it amazing that the House has institutionalised ridiculous times and that we start the formal business of the House when most people are well through their formal working day. Apart from anything else, we cannot make sensible or reasonable decisions late in the night.

I remember in the last Parliament the debates on a pilotage Bill. I tried to argue a serious point about the employment rights of pilots when the debate had been going on for some time. The debates on amendments to earlier clauses of the Bill were debated thoroughly, but by the time that we got to the later clauses, hon. Members were getting restless. They wanted to get home and the amendments, which were as important as those to the first part of the Bill, did not get the treatment and consideration that they could and should have been given if we had started at a reasonable hour.

Mr. Spearing: That was the fault of hon. Members.

Mr. Wallace: Of course it was, because hon. Members were rebelling over the ridiculous hours that we were sitting and could not give the Bill serious consideration at that time of night.

Mr. Spearing: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that if we come to Parliament to debate matters of difference, we have to sacrifice something——

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): We sacrifice women.

Mr. Spearing: No. We have to operate the least inconvenient system that we can devise, but we are all frail. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will not blame the system when it is we who are imperfect.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is not disagreeing with me. Of course it was Members of Parliament who were saying, "Get on with it," at 10.45 or 11.15 pm. If we started earlier, such debates could take place at a much more reasonable hour when hon. Members would be better equipped to deal with important matters.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South has said that some hon. Members have outside interests. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that, but the sittings of the House should not be geared to suit people who spend time in the City or in the courts and then come here when it suits them. The hours of the House should not be set to suit such people. The House should work decent hours and people with outside interests should be prepared to agree to them.

We are told that Ministers would have difficulty in dealing with work in Departments, but there would be no need for Ministers to attend on mornings when the business of the House did not involve them. The issue of votes causes some concern. I was not here for the experiment in the late 1960s when the late Richard Crossman was Leader of the House. I have read that, at that time, morning votes were postponed and taken at about 7 o'clock in the evening. That could be done again. Seven o'clock may seem like a long time after a morning debate, but the House could often vote before a debate, and it would not make much difference to the outcome. If the will is there, ways can be found to deal with the voting problem.

We are told that Committee work would intervene. I suspect that that majority of Standing Committees now sit in the afternoon. The Standing Committee on the Finance Bill sits only in the afternoon, and many Select Committees sit when debates are taking place in the House. The Committee argument has no validity.

To change the hours will require some discipline, because I suspect that, so long as there are hours to be filled, some hon. Members, and especially the Government, will find business. I do not accept that we should pack up at 5 o'clock for tea, as I think the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) suggested in the previous debate. We could structure our day so that, with occasional exceptions, we could finish at 10.30 pm.

Mr. Cryer: In the previous debate, I suggested that that idea was in the mind of the hon. Members who proposed a Select Committee. The hon. Gentleman suggests that I endorsed that. I am against it because, like other hon. Members, I think that the Select Committee will meet the needs of London Members and not those of provincial Members.

Mr. Wallace: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for misinterpreting him. I think that he suggested that that was the motivation for the proposal for a Select Committee. What he suggests would not necessarily happen. We could change the hours of the House and operate more realistically.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) spoke about the difficulties faced by hon. Members who live outside London. I have a strong claim to speak about that, because I live further from London than any hon. Member. It is difficult to see people at their place of work, speak to local government officials or visit schools because such things can be done only on weekdays. As the hon. Member for The Wrekin said, we get many worthy representations and it is difficult to be in the House on Fridays for a vote on what is usually an important private Member's Bill. I hope that the Committee will address that problem, perhaps by looking at ways in which Friday work can be concluded in the morning.

Perhaps, in one week out of three or four, there could be no sitting on a Monday. The United States Senate has three weeks on and one week off. I hope that the Committee will examine those proposals with an open mind, and will reach a conclusion that will enable hon. Members to attend to constituency business at times when constituents can meet them.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it does not follow that those of us who travel long distances to come to the House want to truncate the business into three days a week? Such truncation would lead us into the trap of rushing business and overloading each sitting day. It would be reasonable, however, to start business earlier in the day. On Monday, we could start at a time that would allow every hon. Member, from whatever part of the United Kingdom, to get to the House on time. On Thursday, it would be appropriate to adjourn at a time that would allow every

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

Member to be back at home by the end of the day. To truncate the business into a four-day week in that way would be a great improvement.

Mr. Wallace: I think that that is reasonable. I said that there could be occasions when it might be worth considering not sitting on a Friday or a Monday. We can never legislate for the weather, which might confine us to our constituencies.

Mr. Donald Thompson: There is a difference in ethos between the party that the hon. Gentleman represents and the rest of us. We represent our constituents in Westminster, while Liberal Democratic Members try to be Westminster representatives who are perpetually in their constituencies.

Mr. Wallace: That was a facile comment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman could have done better than that if he had tried. My colleagues and I try to represent our constituents effectively by talking to them to ascertain the issues that they wish us to raise in this place. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to confine his activities to the House and not to be available in his constituency when it is convenient for his constituents to talk to him, that is his lookout.

The parliamentary timetable was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The somewhat modest proposals that were set out in the first report of the Procedure Committee of 1986-87 are a good starting point. School holidays in Scotland inevitably arouse discussion at this time of year. Scottish Members find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that, by the time the House goes into the summer recess, the school holidays in Scotland have nearly come to an end. I hope that there will be greater sensitivity to that unfortunate fact.

We shall tackle these issues only if we consider what the House should not be doing, should be doing less of, or should be doing better. The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) cited private business as a good, clear example. A strengthened European Parliament could remove some of the problems that sometimes confront the business of the House. Proper devolution to Parliaments in Scotland and Wales would certainly relieve the House of much of its business. I take the point about Northern Ireland and the composition of the Select Committee. Given the way in which Northern Ireland business is conducted, even a Select Committee of Northern Ireland Members could not undertake proper examination of it.

I hope that the labours of the Procedure Committee will not, as the hon. Member for Honiton feared, produce a mouse. Perhaps it is asking too much to bring the procedures of this place into the 21st century, but with a bit of luck we might bring the House kicking and struggling into the 20th century.

1.24 am

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I agree with much of what has been said tonight. I welcome the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to set up the proposed Select Committee. If it is established, it will have important repercussions.

I am worried, however, on two or three scores. We shall never improve our procedures unless the Government of the day introduce less legislation than at present. It seems that it has been impossible to reduce the business, whatever Government have been in power, over the past 20 or 30 years.

Secondly, I am concerned about whether, at the end of the day, we shall have the will to accept what the Committee says. I was lucky enough to serve on the Procedure Committee under my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) which put forward many valuable recommendations to the House, the majority of which have just run into the sand, often defeated by the usual channels on both sides of the House just in case they lose out when they are next in Opposition. We must view the matter seriously. We must have the will to implement any constructive recommendations.

Thirdly, I am worried about the possibility of a world tour. If we are to get anywhere at all, for goodness sake let us get on with it and get something prepared for legislation, if that is what is required, in the autumn of 1992. If the Committee is to spend most of the year touring round looking at other Parliaments, its report will not be ready for a couple of years. Therefore, I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to deprecate unnecessary world tours.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) that the end of the second Adjournment debate, which we discussed in the Procedure Committee, would allow the House occasionally to rise at 9 or 10 o'clock. At present, the Whips Offices on both sides of the House keep debates going just to ensure that we do not have a second Adjournment. That would be a simple step, and I do not know why it is turned down whenever it is put before the House.

I am concerned about morning sittings. They did not work at all well when we had the experiment in the 1960s. We must also bear in mind the fact that they would prevent any visits to the House by school parties and others who come regularly every working day.

The Procedure Committee's recommendation on timetabling Standing Committees was valuable. Hon. Members would have an idea when they were to speak, and they could have 10, 20 or 30 meetings, avoiding all the difficulties of dragging the business out to obtain a guillotine, which is another way of wasting everybody's time unnecessarily.

But the most important thing is to get on with this quickly. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House might recommend that the Committee should try to report in time for a debate next July so that we can introduce legislation the following winter to be part of the new procedure in the following year.

Not only is that what the Committee should do, but if we can do anything in the immediate future that is obvious to both Front Benches and acceptable to the House, let us do it because we are having an immense amount of late night sittings. I also agree about the negative procedure, which is quite unsatisfactory, as are many of the affirmative resolutions which we cannot amend.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will give consideration to making immediate changes that are acceptable to both sides which would improve practical work week by week, and then set the Committee a timetable to try to report within 12 months from now, so that we might make progress the following winter.

1.28 am

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I have been through a number of debates such as this before in my 17 years in the House and the one thing that I have learnt during those years is that, the longer one is in the House, the more one comes to realise that our procedures are not quite as mad as some people would have us believe.

Not every hon. Member is here this evening. In fact, only a small minority of them are. Therefore, most people who wanted to be in bed two or three hours ago are probably already in it. I most certainly could have been in it had I so desired.

I do not wish to take up too much of the House's time; time is running short, and I know that a number of other hon. Members want to speak.

I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott). I hoped that he would tell us whether he was expressing his personal view or that of his party. I still do not know the answer, but perhaps we shall be told before the end of the debate. In any event, Northern Ireland Members know very well what it is like to sit late, as much of the Northern Ireland business is dealt with long after 10 pm. We are more than fed up with that. We should like to have prime time, but better this time than no time at all. I think that we should be given more time, however.

Mr. Wilson: As one who has listened sympathetically, late at night, to comments about the derisory time that is allowed for Northern Ireland business, I find the hon. Gentleman's attitude remarkable. What does he mean, "better at dead of night than not at all"? No one is suggesting "not at all". Surely, if the hours were brought forward to a reasonable extent, Northern Ireland business and all other business could be discussed, and nothing would be lost.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman, like many other hon. Members, appears to be very fortunate, given that his mornings are so free from the pressures of constituency correspondence and so forth that he is able to come and sit in the Chamber. Anyone who walks in during any debate will generally find far fewer hon. Members here than are present tonight. This is supposed to be a debating Chamber, to which people come to be convinced of an argument, but far too few come to listen to the views of the opposing side. If more did so, wiser decisions might be reached.

Hon. Members have said that we should try to conduct our affairs as effectively as possible. The motion uses the word "effectively", but not the word "fairly". That brings me back to the subject of Northern Ireland. I believe that the affairs of every part of the United Kingdom should be dealt with fairly. Paragraph 37 of the second report of the Select Committee on Procedure, on page xii, refers to

"a statement to the House on 12th June 1986 announcing the Government's intention to dissolve the Northern Ireland Assembly".

On 19 June, in the dissolution order,

"Ministers reiterated the Prime Minister's offer of talks about arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business at Westminster. In the light of that we do not intend to refer further at this stage to these arrangements. Nevertheless we make it clear that the present method of dealing with Northern Ireland business unavoidably encroaches on the time of the House."

Rev. Martin Smyth: And that was four years ago.

Mr. Ross: Five, actually.

I understand that another series of Select Committee proposals are floating around, but as yet they are neither printed nor available. It is suggested that the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee has been recommended. Please could we have one? There is no good reason for further delay, in the 20th year of direct rule. It is time that Northern Ireland business was dealt with properly, and that the House, as a democratic institution, did its duty for the people who live there.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It is not democratic.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but I think that it is, in the sense that the majority in the House get what they want. I for one am prepared to live by majority rule, although I am expected to live by minority rule at home—and I do not like that very much.

The Select Committees do useful work, and the absence of a Select Committee for Northern Ireland is a glaring, scandalous deficit. Now is a good time for the Government to set one up. Every day, motion No. 48 appears on the Order Paper, pointing out how simple it would be to end that scandal. Is there any good reason why it should not be done immediately? The reality is that common justice demands the creation of such a Committee for Northern Ireland. I hope that that common justice is done for those whom I represent in the near future.

I should like to go on but, since so many other hon. Members want to contribute, I shall sit down and leave the Floor to them.

1.34 am

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): In common with other right hon. and hon. Members, I have listened to the debate carefully. There is considerable merit in many of the arguments advanced and I am sure that the Leader of the House will take note of them.

I want to raise an issue that has not been mentioned. I premise my remarks by saying that I am not speaking of my personal position. I believe that the Leader of the House and the Select Committee have a responsibility to every hon. Member and the staff who serve us so well to consider their health.

Each hon. Member sitting in the Chamber now is completing a 17-hour day. We are expected to be back here tomorrow morning to attend the Select Committee of which I am a member. In my short service to the House, I have seen many men and women of great stature and gift whose lives have been ruined by poor health brought about by their service to the House.

The only personal case to which I shall draw the attention of the House occurred in 1979 when a colleague and I sat in the House for 49 continuous hours. We were both Members from the provinces, and at the conclusion of that sitting we joined the same train to go back to our constituencies. That night my colleague committed suicide —I refer to Jocelyn Cadbury, who served the constituency of Birmingham, Northfield so well. I was close to him, and I believe that nothing but the strain of that long sitting of two days and two nights caused his suicide.

I believe that we have a responsibility to one another and a great responsibility to our constituents to ensure that our work in the House does not damage the health of hon. Members and the support service staff. When the Select

[Dr. John G. Blackburn]

Committee meets, I hope that it will consider and safeguard the health of all hon. Members and staff of the House. In my judgment, it has a responsibility so to do.

1.37 am

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I welcome the establishment of the Select Committee, but is absolutely ridiculous that we are discussing that Committee and its terms of reference at 1.30 in the morning when everyone else in their right mind is in bed.

We are not airline pilots going through time zones or people in the national health service——

Mr. Cryer: Nurses and transport workers work all hours.

Ms. Harman: I just said that we are not members of the health service who need to work on a continuous basis, 24 hours a day. We are not working in a steel mill or somewhere with a continuous flow of work. There is nothing inevitable about our having to work at this time. This practice is self-imposed or imposed by tradition. If we have the will and the sense, we can change it.

Many arguments in favour of change have already been made. There can be no doubt that the hours of the House are one of the reasons—not the only one—why there are so few women in the House. It is hard to combine motherhood with work in what is laughingly described as the mother of Parliaments. It is becoming more normal for people outside the House to combine having a young family with work. If employment patterns outside are changing to enable women to combine work with motherhood, is it not time that the House changed so that women can be not only Members of Parliament but mothers? How can we be taken seriously in employment debates on changing the pattern of employment, flexible hours, women returners and child care when the House cannot change itself to hear the voices of women?

On a range of issues—child care, the difficult balance between work and home and the difficulties of caring for the elderly—women have different experience from men. Although women's lives are changing, the lives of men and women are still very different. We need the experience of more women to shape our policy making.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): I am listening carefully to what the hon. Lady is saying. I am sure that she does not wish to portray women as the weaker sex. If she subscribes to business hours, does she agree that some women Members could not return home in the evening because their children and family would be miles away in their constituency? Is she not talking from a London point of view? Does she agree that a compromise would be if we finished at 10 pm and at 7 pm on a Thursday, because then we would not return to our children or constituents as zombies and would give them the quality of life that they and us need?

Ms. Harman: I do not believe in the least that women are the weaker sex, but there is not an equal division of labour in the home. When women take most of the responsibility at home, the working patterns of men and women are different.

The hon. Lady mentioned the difference between hon. Members who serve London constituencies and those who serve constituencies outside London. That was well dealt with by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). If we started at the same time on Monday but moved forward the sitting times for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, those who live in London would be able to go home, and those who do not would be able to leave on Thursday at a more reasonable hour.

The Leader of the House said that this issue is not only about women Members of Parliament, but that the Committee will examine issues that affect the representation of women in the House. I hope that it will take that seriously, and that 13 men and two women will not decide that it is nothing to do with the representation of women in Parliament and that everything can carry on the same without the voice of women being heard in the House.

The second argument about changing the hours is that it will make the House more effective. If we were starting from scratch, no one would suggest sitting until the small hours. In the Tea Room and the corridors, one hears talk about "keeping it going" and about "going through the night". That is a lot of macho nonsense. Hon. Members do not show their commitment to their constituents by speaking for a hour and a half or by proving that they can stay awake until 3 am. They prove only that they have lost their sense of perspective, their contact with the real world, and that they cannot see the wood for the trees. I do not think that constituents are well represented by boss-eyed workaholics who have long since lost touch with ordinary life.

Many hon. Members admit privately that our hours are crazy, but it is a bit like the emperor's new clothes. They have not dared argue for a change in the hours for fear of being accused by some hon. Members of being lazy or of not being committed. I am grateful that at least that argument is out in the open.

The argument is not about changing or reducing the hours to give Members an easier life. It is about moving the hours forward, so opening up Parliament to women and making it more effective. The big question is whether the House, dominated now by tradition and men, is capable of making that change, so opening up Parliament to the next century and to more women.

I hope that the Select Committee will not say that it cannot be done because it is too difficult to balance the needs and interests of Members who represent northern and southern constituencies, to balance the interests of older and newer Members and to balance the interests of men and women Members. An opportunity now exists for change to be made. If the Committee has the political will, it will find a formula which as nearly as possible meets all those needs and interests.

I recall seven years ago standing at the Bar of the House next to a Conservative Member when this issue was being debated. "Harriet, you will be an old woman before any change takes place," he said. I am now seven years older. I hope that the Committee will prove him wrong.

1.46 am

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I shall make three points. First, I stress the importance of never losing the right of the public to look round the House in the mornings. Any Member who doubts the interest that exists among people wishing to visit this place should visit

the Norman Porch any morning. Thousands of youngsters from schools and groups from Rotary clubs and churches gather there for a tour of the building.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) was right to say that those who advocate morning sittings would prevent all those people from having an opportunity to view the House while it is in Session. The atmosphere and feeling of the place is different when we are not sitting. As the representative of a constituency outside London, I would not come here in a recess to show parties round an empty, echoing Palace of Westminster, when the carpets are up and repairs are in progress.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Dame Jill Knight: I will not give way, as I am anxious to be brief.

Secondly, hon. Members who have asked in this debate that everything should be cut and dried and that we should know weeks ahead exactly what we are doing should accept that this is not a bank or a shop. This is not a normal place of work. We must cope with every kind of emergency, at home—for example, a train crash—and abroad. There might be a happening in Northern Ireland, when an immediate statement is demanded. Should there be two or three disasters, with the same number of statements having to be made in the House, it would be impossible to keep business compartmentalised, as some hon. Members have suggested.

Thirdly, let us never forget that we are sent here to speak for our constituents about matters of concern to them. Those who wish constantly to reduce our hours would make it impossible for us to carry out our duty to our constituents. That must never be allowed to happen. From what some hon. Members have said, one would imagine that we have to swallow lock, stock and barrel what the Committee recommends—if one can swallow locks, stocks and barrels. Surely to goodness we shall debate the Committee's proposals and we shall not have to accept them if we do not like them.

I welcome the establishment of the Committee. Perhaps we shall be able to go home a little earlier at night, but let us not ignore the difficulties of morning sittings, compartmentalised days planned far ahead and cutting ourselves off from our right and duty to speak up for our constituents.

1.50 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I must of necessity be brief.

During the eight years that I have served in the House, I cannot recall having heard a more absurd or introspective debate than that tonight. We are hearing an establishment merely tinkering with the issues. It is not prepared to meet the challenge of becoming a Parliament ready for the 20th century, let alone the 21st century. We can debate moving our working hours backwards and forwards, but until we recognise that Westminster is sunk in tradition and history and is not prepared to mobilise itself to be like other modern Parliaments, there is no point in having a Select Committee such as that which is proposed. It will not deal with fundamental issues, such as proportional representation which is a constitutional right of our people. Nor will it consider the possibility of devolving power from this place to Parliaments in Scotland and Wales and, indeed, in the English regions.

If hon. Members are worried about the amount of work undertaken by this Parliament, one of the easiest solutions to the problem is to allow those of us who wish to have Parliaments in our own countries to have them and to deal with our affairs in our countries. That would release the poor souls who so often have to stay behind wearily to ensure that the Government have a majority against the rebellious Scots who, from the Opposition Benches, represent most of the Scottish people.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) placed great emphasis on the issues covered by other Select Committees. There is one Select Committee which is not costing the British taxpayer one penny and that is the Scottish Affairs Select Committee which the Government have not established. The Government are talking about establishing a Committee to consider the hours of the House, but they cannot establish one to deal with Scottish Affairs. The lack of one is costing the people of Scotland dear. We need to discuss issues that are vital to our country, such as the steel and fishing industries, the national health service and education, but we do not have that facility.

This debate is contemptuous of the Scottish people and their needs and, I suspect, of the Welsh people, the Northern Irish and many people from the English regions. This is a London debate about some hon. Members getting home to their families at night. We do not have that opportunity.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Leeds, North-East) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 120, Noes 28.

Division No. 204] **[1.54 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, James	Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Fallon, Michael
Atkins, Robert	Favell, Tony
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Baldry, Tony	Forth, Eric
Bellingham, Henry	Freeman, Roger
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Goodlad, Alastair
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Boswell, Tim	Gregory, Conal
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Grist, Ian
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Ground, Patrick
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Brazier, Julian	Hague, William
Bright, Graham	Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Burns, Simon	Harris, David
Butterfill, John	Heathcoat-Amory, David
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Carrington, Matthew	Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Cash, William	Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda	Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Chapman, Sydney	Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Chope, Christopher	Hunt, Rt Hon David
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*	Irvine, Michael
Colvin, Michael	Jack, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*	Jackson, Robert
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John	Janman, Tim
Currie, Mrs Edwina	Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*	Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Dorrell, Stephen	King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James	Kirkhope, Timothy
Durant, Sir Anthony	Knapman, Roger
Eggar, Tim	Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Emery, Sir Peter	Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*

Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Widdecombe, Ann
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carr, Michael
Cox, Tom
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Lewis, Terry
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Alan Meale.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment proposed, in second paragraph, to leave out 'to adjourn from place to place'.—*[Mr. Cryer.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division:—

Mr. Salmond *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could it be construed that those who will serve on the Select Committee have a financial interest in defeating the amendment and should be debarred from voting on it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Every hon. Member is perfectly entitled to vote on the amendment.

Mr. William Ross *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it not have been in order for those on the Select Committee to declare an interest before they voted?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a procedural motion, and any hon. Member is entitled to record his vote.

The House having divided: Ayes 23, Noes 121.

Division No. 205] **[2.04**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cox, Tom
Dixon, Don
Durant, Sir Anthony
Foster, Derek
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Janman, Tim
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Vaz, Keith
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Terry Lewis.

NOES

Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dewar, Donald
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
Fyfe, Maria
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Wallace, James
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilson, Brian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Knight and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 14.

Hon. Members: Oh, no.

Division No. 206] **[2.15 am**

AYES

Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Atkins, Robert
Baldry, Tony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dewar, Donald
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Freeman, Roger
Fyfe, Maria
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grocott, Bruce
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Wallace, James
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilson, Brian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Cox, Tom
Dixon, Don
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Haynes, Frank
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Skinner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Terry Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That a Select Committee of fifteen Members be appointed to consider whether the public and private business of the House might be conducted more effectively by making changes to the order and timing of items of business, the hours of sitting, and the arrangement of the Parliamentary year; and to make recommendations thereon:

That five be the quorum of the Committee:

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place; and to report from time to time:

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference:

That the Committee have leave to confer and meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on procedure of that House for the purposes of deliberating and of examining witnesses on any aspects of the Committee's order of reference which affect that House as well:

That Hilary Armstrong, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Alistair Burt, Sir Peter Emery, Mr. David Harris, Dr. Kim Howells, Mr. Michael Jopling, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Cranley Onslow, Mr. Stanley Orme, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Peter Shore, Mr. Roger Sims and Mr. Michael Stern be members of the Committee:

That the Second Report of the Select Committee on Procedure in Session 1986-87, in the last Parliament, relating to the use of time on the Floor of the House, be referred to the Committee: and

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House until the end of the Parliament.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You probably heard the note of derision from Conservative Members when they heard that there were only 14 votes against the motion. There are 15 members on the Committee that has been set up, and a majority of those members, who will travel all over the world before deciding on the sittings of the House, have never been present for the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate, not a point of order for the Chair.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question proposed,

INFORMING AND CONSULTING EMPLOYEES

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4466/91 relating to the establishment of European Works Councils; endorses the conclusions of the Madrid and Rome European Councils that measures taken in the field of social affairs should have full regard to the effects on job creation, the principle of subsidiarity and the diversity of national traditions and practices; supports the Government's view that the draft directive is incompatible with these conclusions; and endorses the Government's proposal for a Community initiative on employee involvement which might take the form of a Council recommendation or resolution.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Amendment proposed, leave out from second 'Councils' to end and add:—

'draws attention to the Government's consistent refusal to advance the interests of the British working people on any matter where the Social Charter and its action programme are concerned; and deplores the Government's refusal to play a constructive role in producing a Directive which will ensure that British workers have the same rights as their counterparts on the Continent.'.—*[Mr. Haynes.]*

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees), That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 23, Noes 108.

Division No. 207] **[2.27 am**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carr, Michael
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Grocott, Bruce
Lewis, Terry
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Skinner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Widdecombe, Ann
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order:—

The House divided: Ayes 108, Noes 23.

Division No. 208] **[2.37 am**

AYES

Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Atkins, Robert
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carr, Michael
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grocott, Bruce
Lewis, Terry
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Skinner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accoringly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4466/91 relating to the establishment of European Works Councils; endorses the conclusions of the

Madrid and Rome European Councils that measures taken in the field of social affairs should have full regard to the effects on job creation, the principle of subsidiarity and the diversity of national traditions and practices; supports the Government's view that the draft directive is incompatible with these conclusions; and endorses the Government's proposal for a Community initiative on employee involvement which might take the form of a Council recommendation or resolution.

Stobhill General Hospital, Glasgow

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

2.48 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): May I convey my thanks through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to Mr. Speaker for granting me this Adjournment debate on a subject of great local importance—the future of Stobhill general hospital in my constituency?

The hospital is in the north end of Glasgow and serves not only my constituency but that of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who is in the Chamber at this early hour. It also serves the constituents of my hon. Friends the Members for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) and for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray), and of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I am grateful to the Minister for being here to respond to the debate.

The staff, patients, patients' relatives and people who live in the community are attached to the hospital, which has served them since the first world war, but feel that its casualty department is not all that it could be. If someone suffers bone damage, he or she is sent to the Royal infirmary, which is about two or three miles down the road in the Townhead area of Glasgow. A patient can sit in casualty for a long time only to be told that he or she will be moved to the Royal Infirmary and will have to go through the same procedure again.

The Minister will know that in urban areas, where unemployment is high and there are many social problems, at least 40 per cent. of admissions are of people who prefer to be treated at the casualty department than by their general practitioner. That 40 per cent. consists of people who perhaps have an appendix problem, a stomach ulcer, a heart complaint or other serious problem. If the casualty department is run down, it is feared that the hospital will lose at least 40 per cent. of its admissions.

Stobhill, like every general hospital in Glasgow, has been told by Greater Glasgow health board to reduce the number of beds available to the public. The problem is exacerbated by chest patients from east Glasgow who were treated at Belvedere hospital but must now use Stobhill. We are grateful for Stobhill's expert chest consultants, but the Minister will know that unless extra beds are made available there will be severe pressure on the hospital and its highly professional staff who are trying to do a decent job for patients.

I was told only a few weeks ago that an elderly patient who was in the heart ward at Stobhill was woken at 2 am or 3 am and told that she and her bed would be moved to another ward because an acute patient had undergone surgery and needed that specialised ward. It is a sad state of affairs when our elderly, whose generation served us so well and who should be enjoying their retirement, must put up with that. They are shunted off and decanted—that is the best word I can use—in much the same way as a tenant is decanted from his or her home when a repair is necessary. I think that the Minister will agree that that is no way to treat an elderly person.

Doctors at the hospital are complaining about feeling guilty because, owing to the shortage of beds, they are having to put pressure on relatives, particularly those of elderly patients, to get patients discharged, when, in their

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

judgment, some of the patients should remain in hospital for a week or two longer. That is not helping morale among hospital staff or reassuring patients' relatives.

Six of Stobhill's wards are mixed, meaning that men and women share wards for 24 hours a day and toilet facilities. That restricts privacy, particularly for female patients who must be sure to be properly dressed all the time. Should a disruptive patient behave unreasonably, the whole ward could be turned upside down. My daughter Mary was in a mixed ward in Stobhill about a year ago. She had no objection to that and got on well with all the patients, but considering that some, especially female, patients could object to being in a mixed ward, I hope that the Minister will look into the matter.

The diabetic and rheumatology department at Ruchill has been moved to Stobhill. While we are pleased about that, severe pressure has been placed on that department, and on patients and their relatives because no additional beds have been provided.

The Minister will know that on many occasions I have raised the issue of the maternity facilities at Stobhill. It is believed that if we lose the two maternity wards, there could be a knock-on effect. It is feared that anaesthetists might not be needed and that nurse training could be so reduced that none might take place in the hospital. That, too, could affect the casualty department.

I was pleased when originally the Greater Glasgow health board announced that, as a replacement for the Royal maternity hospital in Townhead, consideration would be given to building a new maternity unit in the grounds of Stobhill, where acres of free land are available. Following representations from the medical faculty at the Royal maternity hospital and, to be fair, because of pressure from the local community and trade unions, the board reversed its decision, and the present proposal is now before the Minister.

The board intends to build a new maternity facility as part of phase one of the Royal infirmary. I believe that phase one has been in existence for about 10 years. The addition will, I understand, involve an additional floor being constructed as part of phase one. My information, which I cannot substantiate although perhaps the Minister can, is that the Common Services Agency has ruled out that technique because it would be structurally unsound. It is also possible that such a building could not be insured by any insurance company. If it cannot be built in the Royal infirmary in Townhead, why not revert to the Greater Glasgow health board's proposal and build it in Stobhill, where spacious grounds are available? If that cannot be done, I plead with the Minister to leave some maternity facility at Stobhill.

Although the people in the south end of my constituency, in Dennistown, may feel that the Royal infirmary is as handy as Stobhill, the Minister will remember that people in Torrance, Lennoxtown and Kilsyth depend on Stobhill. It is their nearest general hospital, and they would like a maternity facility in their area.

My time is limited, and the Minister needs time to reply, but I must state that there is great concern about Greater Glasgow health board's attitude in not approving vacancies at the hospital. The Minister will know that the health board must approve every vacancy before the hospital can make an appointment. Young doctors are being interviewed for appointments commencing in August. Only a year or two ago, interviews for new medical posts took place three months prior to the appointment, which meant that we took the cream of the crop. There is no way that doctors will hang on until three weeks before an appointment if they can find a position elsewhere.

Only one chiropodist's vacancy in three has been approved. A renal dietician is needed to give kidney patients advice about their diet, but that vacancy has not been approved. Four vacancies for clerical staff have not been approved. It is also likely that three surgeons will retire, and I hope that those retirements will not provide an excuse to close down the accute surgery service at Stobhill.

I am proud of the hospital and the professional manner in which the staff and those who support them—the ambulance drivers and others—provide the patients with a very good quality of life. The service is second to none, and I ask merely that the Scottish Office, the Government and the Greater Glasgow health board give the hospital the support that it needs.

3.3 am

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) on securing the Adjournment debate and commend him for taking such an interest in Stobhill that we are discussing it now at 3 am. I am sure that his constituents will be impressed. I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman should raise this issue. I welcome the fact that the hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) and the Under-Secretaries of State for Scotland, my hon. Friends the Members for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) are also here to take an interest in the deliberations.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): So am I.

Mr. Forsyth: I thought that my hon. Friend was here to observe the proceedings, not to participate.

Two issues arise: first, the future of Stobhill hospital; secondly, what services it should offer. I shall happily draw the points made by the hon. Member for Springburn about the hospital's day-to-day management to the attention of the chairman of Greater Glasgow health board and ensure that the hon. Gentleman is given a detailed response on each matter.

The hon. Gentleman is concerned primarily with the future of the hospital as a whole. He is afraid that recent changes proposed by Greater Glasgow health board for Stobhill may be the thin end of the wedge and th' , now they are agreed and are being implemented, the next step will be a closure proposal for the whole hospital. The hospital provides a range of acute services—general medicine, surgery, orthopaedics, ophthalmology and so on —as well as extensive services for the continuing care of the elderly and a much-valued accident and emergency department.

I am happy to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman, as I have done before, that there is a commitment to the future of the hospital. Within the past few days, I have received from Greater Glasgow health board a renewed assurance that its strategic planning for acute services is proceeding on the basis that a range of services will

continue to be provided by Stobhill hospital to the north of the city. I can say firmly that there is no proposal with Ministers to remove the provision of acute services from Stobhill or to close the hospital and, indeed, that Greater Glasgow health board is planning on the basis that a range of acute services will continue to be provided from Stobhill for the foreseeable future.

If further evidence were required that Stobhill has a future as an acute hospital, we need only look at the immediate plans of Greater Glasgow health board. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the board is in the middle of implementing a wide range of changes in the pattern of provision of its acute services. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to describe these as cuts. There have been no cuts in the national health service. The NHS has been the beneficiary of substantial additional investment. It is true that Greater Glasgow health board is rationalising its services and that that affects a large number of hospitals, Stobhill being one. Greater Glasgow health board and I are clear that those changes are designed to consolidate and improve the services provided by the hospital.

The board's proposals involve transferring to Stobhill from elsewhere the new specialty of renal medicine and an increase in the bed numbers for the specialties of general medicine, orthopaedics and accident and emergency. That is hardly what would happen if the board were planning to diminish the role of Stobhill or to close it.

The board's rationalisation of its acute services also involved substantial investment—more than £13 million over several years. Part of that is taking place at Stobhill. Greater Glasgow health board has firm plans to spend some £500,000 at Stobhill to build a new day surgery complex. That will help the hospital to meet the changing requirements for health care. Again, it would hardly seem credible for the board to be planning such investment if the closure of the hospital were on the agenda.

The hon. Gentleman said that his constituents were worried about the practice of transferring accident victims requiring orthopaedic treatment to Glasgow royal infirmary. That is true. The orthopaedic service is provided by surgeons who work between Stobhill hospital and Glasgow royal infirmary. The practice is for patients who are taken to the accident and emergency department at Stobhill to receive whatever immediate treatment they require there. Once their condition has been stabilised, those patients who require orthopaedic treatment are taken to Glasgow royal infirmary. That is because the major orthopaedic trauma surgical expertise is based at the infirmary. The board takes the view—reasonably, I think —that to locate this at both hospitals would simply dilute the specialism. I am told that this pattern of service has been in operation for several years and that it works well.

Questions arise about the range of specialties that is to be provided at Stobhill. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Greater Glasgow health board has proposed the closure of the maternity unit at Stobhill. I thought that it might be helpful if I were to say a few words about the background.

The five Greater Glasgow health board maternity units vary in quality. Two of their maternity units at Stobhill and Glasgow Royal maternity hospital—more popularly known as Rotten Row—are housed in buildings that date back to the turn of the century. What was considered then to be appropriate accommodation, design and provision in terms of fabric and layout is clearly no longer acceptable. The continued provision of maternity services must now at the very least be subject to question and review, taking account of changes in the pattern of demand. The health board has done that, and, as part of its review of maternity provision, the Greater Glasgow health board has taken account of the registrar general's population projections to the year 2000.

Based on his findings and taking account of population movement, and also allowing for a margin of error at what must be, by its very nature, an imprecise science, the board has concluded that 371 staffed beds in 1996 and 337 by the year 2000 will be more than sufficient provision. That compares with its present provision of 402 staffed beds across five maternity units. All the board's calculations, projections and estimates are based on the highest use made per bed within its maternity units.

Faced with that position, the board embarked upon an extensive public consultation towards the end of 1989. The board issued a consultative document which proposed that for the north and east of Glasgow, the present maternity services provided from the Glasgow Royal maternity hospital and at Stobhill maternity hospital be replaced by an 84-bed unit to be constructed at Stobhill general.

The consultations, which were completed on 28 February 1990, generated considerable adverse reaction from individuals and organisations from the east of Glasgow.

Having considered all the arguments received, particularly those forwarded by all the consultants within this specialty in north and east Glasgow, the board decided that Stobhill maternity unit and the Glasgow royal maternity hospital should close and that the services they have provided to date should transfer to a new-built unit of 120 beds at Glasgow royal infirmary.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the Common Services Agency and whether that unit was planned to be built on top of an existing building. I understand that the board's proposals are for the new maternity unit to be situated in the car park and not on the site to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The board further plans a second phase reorganisation to provide a new maternity unit at the Queen Mother's hospital, Yorkhill. Those proposals are now being considered by my officials. I assure the hon. Gentleman that no decisions have been taken, and I hope that I will be in a position to announce any decision in the near future.

However, the arguments for retaining maternity services at Stobhill do not appear to be strong. As the hon. Gentleman will know, Stobhill maternity unit is housed in accommodation that dates from 1903. Despite regular refurbishment, the quality of accommodation is not impressive. Although the fabric of the building could be improved, it is not possible within the existing buildings at Stobhill to meet all the minimum space standards set down for maternity units and wards. The main departments of the special care baby unit and the labour wards are separated and relatively distant from ante and post-natal wards.

More importantly, the unit is separated from the main support services of the hospital. The building and its fabric has major physical shortcomings which could not easily be rectified. The board's clear conclusion is that this would not be appropriate and that the investment should take place at Glasgow royal infirmary.

I am well aware of the affection, loyalty and esteem in which Stobhill maternity unit is held by many people in Glasgow and beyond. This was most recently

[Mr. Forsyth]

demonstrated to me through the 700-signature petition lodged in support of the unit. I am also aware of the so-called "Hands Off Stobhill" campaign. I hope that what I have said today assures the hon. Member that the Greater Glasgow health board is are adopting a "Hands On Stobhill" policy.

I cannot offer the hon. Member an assurance that maternity services will continue at Stobhill. As I have described, this question raises a range of difficult and important issues which are currently being considered and which I hope will be decided soon. But on the general issue of the future of the hospital, I am in no doubt that the hon. Member and his constituents can be assured that the board is planning to retain it for the foreseeable future, and it will play an important part in improving the quality of care for the people in the city of Glasgow and beyond.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MIDLAND METRO (NO. 2) BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL

[Lords]

Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered tomorrow.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM ETC.) BILL

Motion made,

That the Promoters of the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham etc.) Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the present Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the present Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the present Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL

That the Promoters of the British Railways Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the present Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and, having been amended by the Committee in the present Session, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Business Rates

1. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many firms failed to pay their business rates last year; what was the total amount involved; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): This information is not available. However, by 31 March this year, charging authorities in England had collected 93 per cent. of their estimated non-domestic rate income for 1990-91 based on returns submitted up to mid-June.

Mr. Brown: As 900 firms per week are going broke, is it not clear that many of them will not have paid their business rates? Yet, to my knowledge, no one has been hounded or gaoled for that. Working people, on the other hand, are expected to pay the poll tax, and if they do not they are hounded and gaoled. Mr. Norman Laws, a pensioner, is in gaol now in the north of England for that reason. That is a disgrace. The Government are not even-handed—they operate double standards. Will the Minister consider releasing people who have been gaoled for non-payment of the poll tax or, better still, will the Government scrap the poll tax immediately and declare an amnesty for everyone involved in a situation of the Government's own making?

Mr. Key: No, Sir.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that there would be less non-payment if a better lead had been given by Members of the House? Is it not a national scandal that law makers should become law breakers, and should not Members of the House who have not paid the community charge be disowned by their Front Bench?

Mr. Key: Of course. Business ratepayers are still liable for what they have not paid, and councils are still pursuing late payers.

City Challenge

2. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when an announcement will be made on the successful bids for city challenge.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I intend to announce the successful authorities by the end of July.

Mrs. Hicks: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the enthusiasm for city challenge in Wolverhampton, and the growing feeling of optimism and anticipation, with the hope that ours may be one of the 10 successful bids? That would benefit especially the deprived area of Low Hill, in my constituency. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if city challenge is to be truly successful and achieve our aims we cannot simply leave it to local politicians, but there must be a partnership of the private sector, the voluntary sector and—most important of all—the people who live in communities such as Low Hill, who best know what they wish to receive from city challenge, and what benefits we can give them?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. City challenge has evoked a remarkable response from local authorities. We are sure that in the bids that we shall begin to evaluate in the next few days an effective partnership will be demonstrated between the public and private sectors and the views of local people.

Mr. Lewis: The Secretary of State will realise that there will be unsuccessful bids—probably five of them. Those five local authorities will have spent a great deal of money and resources on planning officers and treasury officials to work up their bids. Will the Secretary of State compensate such authorities for the money that they have lost? There are winners as well as losers in city bingo—or rather, city challenge.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will understand that, if one has a competition, there tend to be losers, but there is no compulsion at all on local authorities to enter this competition. They are perfectly free not to do so if they wish.

The House will be interested to know that not only did the initial 15 authorities respond enthusiastically, but a further six authorities have submitted bids which they hope we will consider for the first year.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I hope that my right hon. Friend will not be over-persuaded by the obvious charm of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks). May I draw to his attention the enthusiasm of my own city of Nottingham and the welcome that his colleagues from this House and the other place received only recently when the city clearly demonstrated precisely the partnership between local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors that the Government seek. I hope that Nottingham will be high on my right hon. Friend's agenda.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will not misunderstand me if I say that, in a charm competition with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks), he has certain obvious disadvantages. However, both my hon. Friends come high on the list of those who are successful advocates of their own areas, and I am grateful to them.

The Gulf (Coral Reefs)

3. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advantage he has taken of the expertise of Dr. Nigel Downing to make safe from pollution the coral reef areas of Qaru, U Al Maradem, and Kubbar; what help he has given to Dr. Nigel Downing in getting him to the atolls; and what were the results of the meeting between the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) and Dr. Downing and the hon. Member for Linlithgow on 30 April.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The hon. Gentleman was present when I met Dr. Downing and he knows that we fully support the contribution that United Kingdom environmental science, including Dr. Downing, can make in addressing the level of environmental damage in the

Gulf. To that end, we have helped Dr. Downing with local contacts and travel arrangements to the Gulf and I am glad to say that he is now taking advantage of travel, sponsored by my Department, on board one of the regular Ministry of Defence flights to Al Jubayl and will leave for the Gulf this Friday.

Mr. Dalyell: What close logistical field support can Dr. Downing expect from the Department of Environment through its contacts with the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to say that we have already given Dr. Downing much help. I am ensuring that our embassies in the region are informed of his visit. They will, of course, consider what extra help they and the remaining British forces in the area can provide.

Mr. Allason: I congratulate the Government on their action in protecting coral reefs, and particularly on their recent seizure of 4 tonnes of coral originating in the Philippines. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to protect coral reefs, wherever they occur in the world, and to ensure that coral from the reefs is not imported into the United Kingdom in the form of souvenirs?

Mr. Baldry: We shall continue to make whatever contribution we can, within our means, to supporting these very important habitats throughout the world.

Community Charge

4. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities are imposing a surcharge of £20 or more on their community charge payers for the financial year 1991-92 to make up for any non-collection of community charge in the financial year 1990-91.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): We do not have precise information on what is being charged this year for the non-collection of community charge last year, but I know of 71 councils which have added £20 or more to this year's charge for non-collection during the current year.

Mr. Summerson: Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning the Labour-controlled London borough of Waltham Forest for its imposition of a surcharge of no less than £50·29 on the people of my constituency as a result of its failure to collect a reasonable proportion of the community charge last year? Will my hon. Friend further condemn the Labour leader of that council and those of his Labour colleagues who publicly announced last year that they would be refusing to pay the community charge, thus heaping an even greater burden on my constituents this year?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, I warmly support what my hon. Friend has said, and I feel sorry for his constituents. The London borough of Waltham Forest is number seven on the list of non-collection. Lambeth is top, Liverpool second, Islington third, Newham fourth, Southampton fifth, Birmingham sixth, and Waltham Forest, seventh. Those are the worst performers in collecting the community charge, and they are all Labour controlled. In a similar case in Wirral, the leader of the council—Councillor Nolan, who advocated non-payment, putting £75 on the community charge bill—was thrown out by the electorate even though she had a majority of 1,000. The next election in Walthamstow will not be for the London borough but for my hon. Friend's seat, and he will benefit from the backlash.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister agree that, in a city where existing services are virtually non-existent as a result of industrial disputes, it is especially offensive that residents are having to face extra bills of £70·99 this year because of the council's failure to run services properly or to collect outstanding community charge payments? Is it not disgraceful that people are, in effect, being charged double? How does he intend to ensure that people will not face the same situation with the new local tax?

Mr. Portillo: I fear that across a variety of taxes and charges, those people who are public spirited end up paying for the feckless. We must demand that local authorities take effective action. It is offensive that an additional surcharge has been made in Liverpool. I am sure that the people of Liverpool will find it offensive that, on some vital issues, the Liberals voted with Militant and thus prevented the Labour council from being as effective as it would otherwise have been.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is there not a certain inevitability that, if senior Labour councillors run around inciting people not to pay their community charge, tax evaders will take advantage of that and consider it respectable not to pay their taxes? Is it not desperately unfair that, as a consequence of the example set by Labour councillors, ordinary law-abiding people have to pick up the tab?

Mr. Portillo: Quite honestly, I put not paying the community charge, and advocating that, on the same moral plane as fare dodging or shoplifting from supermarkets. It amazes me that Labour Members who advocate non-payment are not thrown out of the Labour party by the leadership. Despite all the fuss that is made about the hard left, some Labour Members are still advocating non-payment.

Mr. Gould: Was it not the Prime Minister who described the poll tax as "uncollectable" and was it not because the Secretary of State and the Minister agreed with him that they decided that the poll tax had to go? Why are the Minister and his colleagues still trying to make political capital out of the difficulties faced by local authorities, especially those in urban areas with highly mobile populations? Why does the Minister not acknowledge the anxieties expressed by the Audit Commission about the problems created for the judicial system and the whole of local government—problems that are intrinsic to the poll tax and are therefore the Government's responsibility? Why cannot the hon. Gentleman be helpful to local government for a change, and begin by abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution rule which carries high administrative costs with virtually no revenue gain?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman cannot shuffle off his reticence about his hon. Friend's advocacy of non-payment. He constantly tries to escape from his responsibility not only to denounce that but to lead a campaign within the Labour party to have those people thrown out.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point, I can tell him that the collection rate on average has been about 90 per

cent. We are talking here about Labour authorities with collection rates as low as 67 per cent. in Lambeth and 68 per cent. in Liverpool and Islington. Labour councils have failed to collect and Labour leaders have advocated non-payment.

Urban Development Corporations

5. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest detailed schedule for the winding up of urban development corporations.

Mr. Heseltine: I have no precise timetable. I will consider the situation of each urban development corporation in the light of circumstances.

Mr. Wareing: In view of the Government's stated enthusiasm for democracy in eastern Europe, can we take it that when the UDCs are wound up, democratic forms of government will take over? The Merseyside development corporation has done a moderately fine job in the area. Will it come under the auspices of an elected council, such as the previous Merseyside county council, which, before its demise, had the support of politicians of all parties in the locality?

Mr. Heseltine: The UDCs established no new principles that were not built into the new town movement. From the beginning, it was clearly established that when the UDCs made good the deficiencies of largely Labour-run local authorities, the areas concerned would be returned to local democratic control.

Mr. Holt: I thank my right hon. Friend for the Teesside development corporation which, more than anything else, has been responsible for the transformation from the smokestack industries of the north-east to the high-tech industries of today. Would not the advancements be even greater were it not for the lunatics on Langbaurgh council, who recently turned down a private sector scheme worth £50 million of investment which would have brought 400 jobs to one of the most hard-pressed parts of the region? The Labour council turned the scheme down because it preferred unemployment.

Mr. Heseltine: The whole House will be deeply shocked by my hon. Friend's story, but I must support him by saying that the urban development corporation on Teesside will, in the near future, be seen to have given rise to the most exciting rebirth of enterprise and activity on Teesside probably seen in this country this century.

Derelict Land

6. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of derelict land still remain in Northumberland and Tyneside which qualify for financial assistance for reclamation.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): The derelict land survey of 1988 recorded nearly 3,000 acres of derelict land that were considered to justify reclamation. Financial assistance for the reclamation of derelict land in Northumberland and Tyneside is available through derelict land grant or the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation and it is estimated that since the survey about 900 acres have been reclaimed.

Mr. Garrett: Is the Minister aware that this scheme was running long before the Government's 12-year rule and has been running all those years with moderate success? He may not be aware of the fact, but the last pit heap to the west of Newcastle has now been levelled out. He probably is aware that much of the reclamation of the industrial dereliction in Northumberland and Tyneside has now been virtually completed. Will the Minister direct the resources that have now been released from the projects in those two areas to the cleaning up of the pollution on the beaches in Durham which is still caused by mining extraction?

Sir George Young: I understand that the ancestry of the derelict land grant goes back to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) when he was at the Department of the Environment. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Resources are available for derelict land grant in his constituency. About £4 million is available for spending in Northumberland and Tyneside. On top of that, about £11 million is available for spending through the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation. I will ensure that both know of the specific claim on that grant that has been made in the House this afternoon.

Environment White Paper

7. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the progress of implementation of the policies of "This Common Inheritance".

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): We continue to make excellent progress. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on Monday that we will publish a full annual progress report later this year.

Mr. Hughes: I welcome the progress that the Government have made and their green words, but is there not a long and large gap between their words and their actions? In "This Common Inheritance" the Government said that one of the greatest environmental problems facing the world was global warming, but three months ago the Select Committee on Energy and this month the House of Lords European Select Committee roundly criticised the Government for their inadequate efforts on energy efficiency. When will the Government's actions match their words?

Mr. Trippier: I am surprised at the churlish attitude adopted by the hon. Gentleman. Whatever praise there was was incredibly limp wristed and weak kneed, which is typical of the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Gentleman should look to cleaning out his own party's back yard. It beggars belief that any party should try to convince the electorate that it is serious about reducing carbon dioxide levels when it has pledged to scrap the nuclear programme and replace it with coal-fired energy, which would bring about a dramatic increase in carbon dioxide.

Mr. Adley: Does my hon. Friend recall my vain attempts in Standing Committee to include noise within the ambit of the Environmental Protection Bill? Now that the Department of Transport has at last issued a new document which includes concern about noise, will my hon. Friend do one thing for me? He is presumably aware

that his Department part-funds the Airfields Environment Federation. Will he agree to meet its director with me and with a Minister from the Department of Transport so that we can try to get to the bottom of the problems which have been caused in the past by interdepartmental wrangling on the problem?

Mr. Trippier: I shall be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and any colleague from the Department of Transport whom he may wish me to meet. Obviously, I do not subscribe to the wrangling that takes place between various Departments on environmental issues. The truth is that one can hardly get a razor blade between us.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Given the commitments to the water industry in "This Common Inheritance", will the Minister explain why there has been slippage on every area of investment in the water industry's core services but an increase in spending on management?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady should take this opportunity to recognise that the highest standards which are being achieved are the result of the Government's having established the National Rivers Authority. The fact that the Government privatised the water industry has allowed it to undertake a £28 billion programme. The hon. Lady and the House should be reminded that the last Labour Government savagely cut the amount of money that they gave to the water authorities. Their term in office was an absolute disgrace.

Miss Emma Nicholson: In this context, will the Minister pay tribute to the fine results of South West Water, which were recently announced by its chairman who, through privatisation, has managed to re-energise South West Water by pouring truly massive investment into the infrastructure, particularly in the Bideford area, which had never happened before?

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in praising the efforts of South West Water. I repeat the point that I made earlier—that part of the £28 billion now available to be spent during the next 10 years by South West Water is money that certainly could not have been drawn from Her Majesty's Treasury, where such a proposal would have had to take its place in the queue with other competing and serious demands for money for health, education and so on. We have achieved that investment programme by taking the courageous step of privatising the water industry, and it is a success.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

8. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the extension of compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Key: The introduction of competition into local authority services has produced demonstrable gains in efficiency and value for money, and I am actively considering ways of extending the range of services subject to compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Cryer: Instead of wasting resources on compulsory competitive tendering, which denies those citizens who are affected the right to democratic accountability through their local councillors, why does the Department of the Environment not spend resources on protecting and helping local authorities by checking the list of banking institutions that it sends to every local authority and finding out about banks such as the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, which appears on the current list issued by the Department of the Environment? The Department encouraged local authorities to invest in shabby concerns without knowing anything about them at all, which has resulted in the loss of millions of pounds invested by local authorities on the advice of the Minister's Department. Why does he not do something about that instead of helping seedy contractors to reduce the standard of democracy?

Mr. Key: The compulsory competitive tendering process has produced enormous gains for consumers. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's citizens charter will do even more. My Department issues no list of such banks. As the hon. Gentleman should know, a list is issued by the Bank of England. I have carefully looked at the allegations that the hon. Gentleman made in points of order yesterday and there is no truth in them.

Mrs. Roe: Is it not ironic that the Government's policy on compulsory competitive tendering for council services, which was fought so hard by the Labour party, should now be the only policy that is saving the ruling Labour group on Liverpool council from the terrible mess into which it has got both itself and the city?

Mr. Key: We are delighted at the Labour party's late conversion to the benefits of compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. O'Brien: When do the Government intend to introduce quality into contracted-out services? So far, they have targeted only the number, size and value of contracts —quality of services has not been targeted. Before there is any extension of compulsory competitive tendering, will the Government ask Birmingham univeristy to study the quality of services provided as a result of compulsory competitive tendering? We need good-quality services for all the people who depend on local governent services.

Mr. Key: Quality is one of local authorities' considerations in setting the criteria in awarding contracts. It is entirely up to them to set the standards of quality, and I repeat that my right hon. Friend's citizens charter will deal with that issue afresh.

Mr. Squire: Is not it strange that a decision that in the private sector is a matter of fact—that it is more efficient and beneficial to employ people in house rather than to bring in outside contractors—has for the Opposition become an ideological obsession? Until they are seen to be acting in the interests of the users rather than of those working in local government, do not they forfeit any right to be considered an alternative Government?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition are split down the middle on the issue—sometimes they find it convenient to support the idea, but sometimes they find it convenient to rail against it. They have no solution of their own, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Public Rented Sector

9. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's policy towards the public rented sector.

Sir George Young: Our policy is set out in chapter 7 of the Department of the Environment's 1991 annual report —Cm. 1508.

Mr. Winnick: Why should so many people be denied adequate rented accommodation? I think that hon. Members probably receive more letters about housing and the need to be rehoused than on any other subject, so why should people be penalised because they cannot afford to buy and because the chance of getting a council house is now so remote? When Ministers go home in their chauffeur-driven cars—usually to one of their palatial homes—do they notice, two or three minutes from here, people living in squalor on the streets? They are some of the victims of the Government's housing policy.

Sir George Young: On the second point, the hon. Gentleman should know that more progress in helping people who sleep rough in London has been made in the past six months than in the whole history of the capital city. As for homeless people, I note with interest that there are 74 homeless households in Walsall in temporary accommodation, but that Walsall has 989 empty dwellings.

Mr. Sumberg: How high will council rents in my constituency have to rise to compensate for the disastrous decision made by the Labour-controlled council in Bury to invest all its resources—about £6·5 million—in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? Is not that decision an appalling indictment of the Labour leadership in Bury, and are my constituents not entitled to know why it occurred because it has ruined the chances of good services in my constituency for years to come?

Sir George Young: Of course, one sympathises with the charge payers in my hon. Friend's constituency, but the responsibility clearly rests with the local government leaders who took such a decision.

Mr. Soley: When answering this question it will be appropriate for the Minister to remember that today there is a major lobby of Parliament by homeless people following the sleep-out night earlier this week. It is also appropriate for him to remember the Duke of Edinburgh's report which said that about 1·7 million to 1·9 million homes have been lost from the rented sector—about half of them from the public sector—in the past 10 or 11 years. Will the Minister give a more definitive answer to the question, because the previous Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), explicitly expressed the view that councils should no longer provide housing. Does the Minister agree? How soon does he envisage council house provision coming to an end?

Sir George Young: The Government have made it absolutely clear that they look to the housing association movement to provide new affordable homes to rent. They expect local authorities to devote their resources to improving and modernising their stock, and local authorities are now spending twice as much in real terms on improving their stock as they did 10 years ago. That seems a sensible division of responsibility.

Local Government Finance

10. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities would have been capped in 1991-92 if the £15 million limit on expenditure had not been in force.

Mr. Portillo: We now announce our capping criteria in advance. The result is that most councils take care to set budgets which will not be capped. Had capping applied this year to councils with budgets under £15 million, many of them, I am sure, would have set lower budgets than they did, to the benefit of community charge payers.

Mr. Coombs: Is it not good news for hundreds of thousands of community charge payers that the abolition of the £15 million limit on expenditure will force many councils to exercise proper restraint on their future expenditure? Can my hon. Friend quantify the harm already done to community charge payers?

Mr. Portillo: On my hon. Friend's first point, he may have seen in the case of his own local authority the effect beginning to operate last year. Thamesdown district council set a budget of £15·06 million, just above the capping threshold. The increase was 7·7 per cent. I cannot help thinking that the increase was so moderate only because the council was just coming into the capping criteria at that point.

My hon. Friend asked me to quantify the harm. There are 18 districts with budgets below £15 million that overspent their standard spending assessment by £40 or more per charge payer. There were 44 cases in which the overspending added at least £20 to the bills.

Mr. Bellotti: Will the Minister tell us what he expects local authorities that have been prudent in the past and will fall under the capping regulations next year to do about their services? Does he expect them to cut their services so that there can be no local economic generation? In areas that are dependent on jobs in tourism, such as the area that I represent, what advice would the Minister give a local authority that has been prudent in the past and which has set decent budgets, but which, under the new regulations, faces massive local unemployment?

Mr. Portillo: An authority that has been prudent for many years will not be capped because we will not cap below the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware of the good effects for my constituents in Norwich of the capping of their overspending council and the resulting reduction in their bills? Will he seek an urgent meeting with the leader of Labour-controlled Norwich city council to point out the anger of my constituents about the politically biased and possibly illegal letters that she is sending out, which are distorting the effects of Government policy and concealing the imprudence of Norwich city council?

Mr. Portillo: I want to help my hon. Friend. If he absolutely insists that I meet the leader of Norwich city council, I suppose that I could be prevailed on to do so. My hon. Friend speaks loudly and clearly for his constituents. He is worried about the community charge burden that they have to bear. Those on Norwich city council are apparently indifferent to that matter and the Labour party is apparently flatly opposed to helping the community charge payer.

Mr. Flannery: Despite the smart Alec answers from the Minister, is not it a fact that the result not only of capping, but of the vast amounts being taken away from local councils—the total runs into hundreds of millions of pounds—is that beggars are being forced on to the streets and homelessness is created? We have a Minister who apparently treads on bodies when he comes out of the opera. The things that have come about under this Government had not existed for years previously. People are on the streets and, as a nation, not only as a Government, we should all feel deeply ashamed.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is deeply incredible and the whole House will have found what he said laughable. His first contention was that money had been taken away from local authorities. I remind him that the districts about which we are talking had the amount that the Government thought it appropriate for them to spend increased last year by 28 per cent.—vastly ahead of inflation. There can be no complaint that they have been underfunded.

Local Government Reform

11. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has received to his consultation paper on the reform of local government.

Mr. Key: The Department has received more than 1,700 responses to the recent consultation paper on the structure of local government in England and some 750 responses to the consultation paper on the council tax.

Mrs. Currie: Has the Minister received an all-party response from the Tory-controlled city of Derby, which wants to be a unitary authority and which would like to see the abolition of the county council? Has he received in addition an all-party response from the Labour-controlled South Derbyshire district council, which wants to be a unitary authority and which wishes to see the abolition of the county council? Will my hon. Friend ignore what is certain to come—the response from Derbyshire county council? The only people who wish to see that retained are the members of it. Will he kindly get on with the reform and the abolition of the said county council as quickly as possible?

Mr. Key: It is well known that there is antipathy between the county council and the districts in Derbyshire. I am sure that my hon. Friend will draw that to the attention of what we hope will be the local government commission, which will have the responsibility for listening to the important voices in the community. I am sure that my hon. Friend's voice will be heard loudly and clearly.

Mr. Hardy: How many responses reflected the view that this is now the most overcentralised country in the free world? Will the Government accept that the tendency must soon be to shift power from the centre, rather than seek to accumulate ever more?

Mr. Key: I am all for having local accountability and for local responsibility in local government, so I find it very hard to understand why the Opposition wish to take power from local people and give it to yet another tier of government which they laughingly call regional government.

Mr. Burt: Has my hon. Friend received, and would he be prepared to receive, any submissions relating to how local authorities make their financial investment decisions? Is he aware of the considerable anger and distress in my constituency this morning as my constituents woke up to find that they had lost £6·5 million because of a decision to invest in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? Does my hon. Friend agree that the way in which councils make those decisions must come into question? Will he again state the status of the document which was sent out and which did not give any approval to the BCCI in terms of its probity but merely required local authorities to look to their laurels and therefore accept responsibility for their investments?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can understand his constituents' concern about this matter. Of course, financial decisions are entirely the responsibility of the treasurer of the council. I confirm that we do not issue a list of preferred investments. We give absolutely no advice on that matter; it is entirely for the council.

Mr. Trimble: The Government have made clear their preference for single-tier local authorities. Does the Minister therefore agree that one of the great advantages of single tier local authorities is that they would provide the space in which one could create regional assemblies in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions to which the House could then devolve some of its functions?

Mr. Key: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but the hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the desirability of unitary authorities.

Beaches

12. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to meet representatives of the North West Water company to discuss the programme to clean up the Mersey beaches and rivers in the north-west region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend and I maintain regular contacts with the North West Water company about progress on the clean up of bathing waters and rivers.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend will be aware of the massive plans involving billions of pounds over 10 years to clean up the Mersey basin and its attendant rivers. Is my hon. Friend aware of the efforts that are being made by the North West Water company to invest in sewage plants on the north-west coast to clean up the Blackpool beaches, Southport and Formby? Does my hon. Friend agree that that can be achieved only by a privatised company borrowing in the marketplace and doing what the public sector neglected to do for years?

Mr. Trippier: I not only agree with my hon. Friend but I am very anxious to join him in his praise of the Mersey basin campaign. Since its formation in the early 1980s, an overall improvement in water quality has taken place throughout the whole basin area. About £400 million is being spent by North West Water in major schemes at Southport, St. Anne's, the Fylde coast, Morecambe and Barrow to bring more bathing waters into compliance by

1995. The water company has recently announced a preferred option for the Fylde coast scheme to provide full secondary level treatment. I hope that that scheme will go ahead.

Mr. McCartney: When the Minister meets the chairman of North West Water, will he chastise him for his greed and for the massive pay rise that he has awarded himself since privatisation, when constituents such as mine have been waiting years for investment in proper drinking water and sewerage schemes? Is not it an absolute scandal that the Minister is prepared to meet the gentleman who, the day after hiking up water charges, announced at a press conference a huge pay increase for himself and fellow directors?

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already publicly criticised the wage increases to which the hon. Gentleman refers and I agree with him. The Government's policy on the pay of directors is that salaries should be sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate. The Government believe also that it is essential that pay at all levels reflects the economic facts of life and the importance of beating inflation. Directors need to exercise both leadership and restraint in the rate at which salary levels are increased.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that far more is being done now than was ever done in the past to clear up pollution, such as that at Eagles brook, which flows from my hon. Friend's constituency to mine and then to the Mersey? Does he agree that that shows the strength of the Government's anti-pollution legislation?

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend. The money that is now available to the North West Water company, like all the other privatised water companies, is sufficient to enable it to embark on a massive investment programme which will last to the end of the decade and will result in water of a higher quality in this country than anywhere in the rest of Europe.

Mr. Win Griffiths: When the Minister meets the chairman or any of the directors of North West Water or of any of the other water companies of England and Wales, will he take steps to do something about the salary rises that he is so willing to condemn? May I suggest that he knocks £10 off their salaries whenever there is a pollution incident in any part of the Mersey or anywhere else in the United Kingdom? Is it not a disgrace that after 12 years of Tory rule the country still fails to meet the European Community's water quality standards?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman completely and utterly ruined his question, which was obviously prepared prior to the substantive answer that I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). I am afraid that his hon. Friend stole his thunder. Perhaps my response was not what the hon. Gentleman had expected. In response to the hon. Gentleman's latter point, he should ask himself, "Who invented the National Rivers Authority?" We did. Who invented Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution? We did. Who invented the drinking water inspectorate? We did. Why does not the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to praise the Prime Minister and the Government for the initiative that was taken on Monday to set up the strongest regulatory body in the whole of Europe?

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

13. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has had to the launch of his countryside stewardship scheme.

Mr. Heseltine: The countryside stewardship scheme, which is being run on a pilot basis in England by the Countryside Commission, was launched on 25 June. The closing date for applications for this first year of the scheme is not until 31 October. While it is far too early to assess the response, initial reaction has been very encouraging. In the first week following the launch there were more than 300 serious inquiries from potential applicants and there has also been extensive media interest.

Mr. Paice: The whole House should welcome my right hon. Friend's answer, because it demonstrates that the widespread support that that announcement received in the press is clearly mirrored by the response from applicants. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this targeted way of sustaining fine and important landscape features is a far better way of achieving the objective and that the use of the carrots that he is advocating, rather than the big-stick bureaucracy, which is precisely the sort of measure that is advocated by the Labour party, is the better way?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The House may be interested to know that the Countryside Commission has a target for the first two years of the scheme of between 2,000 and 3,000 agreements that will cover 60,000 to 80,000 hectares.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Secretary of State remind the House how much money the Government are putting into the scheme? Is he satisfied that it is sufficient and that, through the Countryside Commission, it is his Department which is best able to handle the scheme, rather than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which, in many cases, has more contact with the farmers involved?

Mr. Heseltine: There is a commitment of £13 million for the first three years of the scheme. We believe that that is sufficient to prove the value of the experiments that the Countryside Commission has launched. On the hon. Gentleman's point about the relationship between my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Minister and I were both present at the launch and are both enthusiasts of the scheme.

Housing Associations

14. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline the level of financial support for housing associations in the current financial year.

Mr. Yeo: The gross capital expenditure planned by the Housing Corporation this year is £1,588 million—an increase of more than 40 per cent. over last year. Revenue support for housing associations is £85 million and housing associations also receive support from local authority housing association grant, estimated at about £300 million in the current year. All that public sector support is supplemented by substantial loans from the private sector.

Mr. Riddick: Is my hon. Friend aware that Labour councillors in my local authority of Kirklees have complained recently about the increase in the number of homeless, even though they have contributed to that increase by refusing to co-operate with the Housing Corporation because one housing association expressed an interest in the tenants' choice scheme? Has any progress been made following our Adjournment debate? Will he join me in condemning the thoroughly negative attitude of the Labour councillors?

Mr. Yeo: I certainly unreservedly condemn the Labour council in Kirklees for withdrawing its support from the Jephson housing association merely because the housing association responded positively to the Government's initiatives to promote tenants' choice. Labour's determination to force tenants back into the straitjacket of monopoly local authority control is not confined to Kirklees. Only yesterday the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) threatened the tenants of north Hull that, if it were ever given the chance, Labour would overthrow the result of the recent ballot in which the tenants voted to become tenants of a housing action trust. I am glad to assure my hon. Friend that he has the full support of the Government in his efforts to champion the interests of tenants in his constituency, efforts which I am glad to say have restarted a dialogue between the Housing Corporation and the borough council.

Mr. George Howarth: Is the Minister aware that, once the hot air evaporates, an examination of the agreed Housing Corporation development programme will show that 93 per cent. of the increase in the programme will go to London and the south-east and therefore, by definition, not to the provincial towns and cities? Is he also aware that hardly any housing associations are carrying out rehabilitation work on older properties? Does he realise that all of that will lead to homelessness shifting out into the provincial towns and cities and will do nothing to arrest the decline in the older housing stock in Britain as a whole? What does he intend to do about it? When will he take some action instead of just talking?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning has already referred to the huge increase in local authority spending on renovating the existing housing stock. The House will be aware that the Housing Corporation's budget is to double from £1 billion to more than £2 billion in the space of three years. I am glad to say that so successful are the Government's efforts to clear the problem of homelessness that the census that took place on 21 April revealed that only 2,703 people were sleeping rough that night—less than 1/14th of the figure used by the promoters of national sleep-out week. In London the numbers were down to only 1,275—a demonstration of our clear progress.

Council Tax

15. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received on the proposed council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Department has received some 750 responses to the recent consultation paper on the council tax, most of which welcome the new tax in principle. These responses are now being considered.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that the overwhelming response, made not only to his Department but made as he travels around the country, is in support of the proposed council tax? Has my hon. Friend been overwhelmed by any clamour for a return to the discredited old rating system, which is what the Labour party proposes?

Mr. Portillo: Most certainly I am not aware of anyone except the Labour party who wants to go back to the rating system. It would be bad enough if the Labour party merely proposed a return to the rating system, but it proposes a bureaucratic nightmare in which each property would have to be revalued four times over. What little chance people had of understanding the rating system would be blown apart by an even more complicated system. One suspects that the Labour party has struggled to design a system that the public cannot possibly understand because it hopes in that way to avoid the electoral consequences of proposing such an absurd tax.

Mr. Gould: What calculation has the Minister made of the impact on the likely level of the council tax and, indeed, the level of the poll tax in the intervening period, of the failure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? Does not the fact that many local authorities now face the prospect of serious loss mean that millions of poll tax payers will suffer as a consequence of the regulatory failure over which the Government have presided? Is not it typical that the Government should now be trying to blame local authorities when they have done no more than act in accordance with the list prepared by the Bank of England and sent out by the Minister's Department to every local authority? That revised list was published and sent out on 21 June and it clearly includes the name of BCCI. Why will not the Minister face up to the part that he has played and the responsibility that his Department must bear in this whole unhappy episode?

Mr. Portillo: First, it is not possible to make any estimate of what anybody has lost, because we do not know. We have no idea of the outcome of this particular bank crash for any local authority. On the question of responsibility, I must say that it might be reasonable to argue that an average person might not realise that an authorised institution, which is accredited under the Banking Act 1987, might crash. However, for local authority treasurers to say that they did not understand the difference between some sort of guarantee—that is now being claimed—and the fact that BCCI happened to be an authorised institution under the Banking Act 1987 is astounding.

The Government are not avoiding any of their responsibilities in this regard, but I fear that some local authority treasurers are trying to imply that the fact that an institution is authorised under the Banking Act gives them some escape from their duty to take due care as to where they invest their funds.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the new council tax will, rightly, have reserve rate-capping powers? In that context will he bear in mind the appalling position of the Labour-controlled Wyre Forest district council, which at present is not only spending 58 per cent. above its standard spending assessment, but has such a bloated recreation programme that one museum is subsidised to the extent of £7 per visit?

Given that that council is proposing this year to increase its expenditure again by 18 per cent. will my hon. Friend invoke his rate-capping powers against that council as quickly as possible?

Mr. Portillo: What my hon. Friend tells me appals and worries me very much. What I think will worry my hon. Friend's constituents when the election comes around is that the Labour party will campaign on there being no restraint whatever on local authority spending or on the bills that will be charged to local people. I believe that that Labour party proposal will be deeply unpopular with the electorate.

16. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to distribute the income from the non-domestic rates under the new council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: We are currently considering the options, and will make clear our conclusions in due course.

Mr. Eastham: Is it not a fact that the whole position regarding local taxes is becoming a complete dog's dinner? Will the Minister apply himself to the question of non-domestic ratepayers, who could account for between 25 and 26 per cent. of the bill of local authorities?

What provision will the Minister make for the hundreds of millions of pounds that may be collected from those who may not be on a local authority register but who are still subject to that authority acting responsibly to make provision for their businesses?

Mr. Portillo: I hope that I can be helpful to the hon. Gentleman. We are not proposing changes to the national non-domestic rate system in general and we have made that perfectly clear in our consultation document. The hon. Gentleman asked about the means by which the income from non-domestic rates would be distributed between local authorities. That is a complicated and technical matter and it would be worth while to spend some time thinking the implications through before making any announcement.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend think again about the way in which non-domestic rates' income is no longer linked to the local authority area. Many of my local business men, particularly in the hotel sector and the leisure industry, would like to think that their business rates will pay the high costs that their local authority must face to subsidise and supply the facilities for people coming on holiday to the wonderful beaches of Weymouth, Swanage and other resorts in Dorset.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that some business men would like a strong linkage between themselves and local authorities, and that might be provided by the tax base. Business in general welcomes enormously the fact that business rates increase from year to year by only the rate of inflation and not by the rate at which local authorities increase their spending. That means that, in the first year of the uniform business rate, business paid £1 billion less than it would have done under the old system.

Nuclear Waste

17. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many meetings he has held in the last year with representatives of UK Nirex to discuss the disposal of nuclear waste; and what is the date of the next such meeting.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of Nirex and no date has been arranged for such a meeting.

Mrs. Ewing: Given the great interest that exists on that subject—not only in the highlands and islands of Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom—can the Minister confirm or deny a recent newspaper report, which said that Tom McInerney, the managing director of Nirex, would make a clear statement on 18 July that Sellafield would be the chosen option for the disposal of low-level and intermediate waste?

Mr. Trippier: I am sorry to say that I can neither confirm nor deny it. As I said at the last Question Time when I was being drawn on those issues, it is a decision entirely for Nirex. However, an announcement will be made before the end of the year.

Property Services Agency

3.32 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the Property Services Agency.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): In October 1989, the Government made clear their intention to privatise the activities of the Property Services Agency. We are actively considering a range of possible ways to do that. I shall make a statement when we have chosen from among the many options that we are considering.

Mr. Soley: This is a serious matter. The Government now say that at least three Departments are considering proposals. One option is closure, resulting in about 19,000 redundancies—some 5 per cent. of the total civil service. We are also deeply disturbed at an alternative option—the reference to "large dowries" so that the purchase is made attractive to a private buyer.

We want to know today how large those dowries will be and why nothing was put in the Property Services Agency privatisation Act. We debated that legislation at great length in Committee and on the Floor of the House, but no mention was made of large dowries. What form will those dowries take, and how can the Government be sure that the European Commission will allow them? Are the Government satisfied that the debacle referred to in a letter from the Minister's office concerning Crown Suppliers—the other half of the Property Services Agency—will not be repeated in this case?

If the Property Services Agency is to be made attractive to a bidder by requesting the Secretary of State for Defence to co-operate—the letter constantly refers to him as being "hopefully willing to co-operate"—will that be done by giving the agency large contracts via the Secretary of State for Defence? If the organisation that buys the PSA chooses to run those contracts out and then close the organisation down, what will happen to future work in defence and security establishments? What will happen on the security issue generally, bearing in mind that it involves security work in bases not only in Britain but at British bases in Germany, Cyprus, Belize, Gibraltar, Hong Kong and other places?

What guarantees can the Secretary of State give that issues involving security, employment and redundancy, and the European Commission are protected? Above all, will he guarantee that the public purse will be protected from yet another raid from a Minister who seems more interested in putting his hands into the public pocket and using the money to pay someone to take over a public organisation than in ensuring the good management of property development within Government Departments?

Mr. Heseltine: The whole House will welcome the interest that the hon. Gentleman is now taking in the consequences of running down the defence budget. The Opposition spent the whole of the 1980s trying to run down the defence budget. Now the Labour party seems to realise that there are consequences in doing that, in terms of the number of people who might lose their jobs. There is a certain innumerate tragedy in the fact that Labour Members cannot even read leaked letters and understand them when they come into their hands. The great dowry that Labour Members are talking about is nothing other than the redundancy pay that we wish to protect so as to ensure that people employed in the PSA do not suffer by the changes.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Is my right hon. Friend aware that at the substantial PSA establishment in my constituency staff are worried that, during the 18 months, no real decision has been taken about their future? Will he do all that he can to get ahead with privatisation and not waste time having to talk about it in the House?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much sympathise with the employees in my hon. Friend's constituency. It is precisely because I have been trying to make such progress, in negotiation with my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury, the Minister of Defence and other Government Departments, that all the options are now being considered.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The Minister will be aware that this debate started because the Select Committee on the Environment said that the PSA was inefficient and its lines of communication were too long. If that were so, why did the Government not look at options other than privatisation? Why should some 20,000 people now be threatened with redundancy, with catastrophic effects on communities as far afield as Hastings in East Sussex, where some of my constituents are employed, and overseas in Cyprus? Given the possibility of further waste of taxpayers' money, is it not now time to have a rethink about privatisation and consider other options?

Mr. Heseltine: I deplore the practice of leaking letters, but if people do it, I wish that they would do it not just to the Labour party but to the Liberal party. The hon. Gentleman would then have seen, from the constructive nature of the leaked letter, that it is precisely the Government's intention to look at a range of ways of transferring the PSA to the private sector. That is what the letter was all about.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is this not an absurd fuss about nothing? The letter contains nothing more than that which any intelligent person would expect to see in communications between one Minister and another about the future options for the PSA, a body which we all know to have been thoroughly inefficient and badly managed. Whether the Government decide to privatise or close the PSA, is there not only one consideration that matters—that the taxpayer should get the best possible value for money?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The taxpayer is entitled to be sure that good government delivers the best possible value for money. In seeking such ends, the country at large, the House and Government employees are entitled to be sure that Ministers take proper consideration of the future and the protection of everyone's interests. It is precisely because we have been considering the consequences in terms of redundancy money that we have looked at what it would be necessary to do to ensure that the entitlement of those people would be protected if the PSA were transferred to the private sector.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Ministers have consistently argued that an important strand of the civil service reforms has been to improve the morale and commitment of public servants. What will be the impact on the 19,000 workers at PSA of reports in the newspapers today that Ministers cannot make up their minds whether to sack them all or to sell them off to whichever private sector buyer is most susceptible to sweeteners? Any local council which showed the same woeful level of mismanagement as Minsters have shown in this sorry affair would be booted out of office and financially surcharged. Why is that not also the fate of Ministers at the Treasury and at the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Heseltine: We all know that the Labour party's one obsession in life is to elevate the interests of the producers, and of the trade unions representing them, over and above the interests of the consumer we seek to serve. It is no use Labour Members coming to the House time and again, pretending to serve some wider public purpose when they are actually trying to enhance the scale of public sector activity. If they really understood what the issues of morale were all about, they would realise that many hundreds of thousands of people employed in privatised industries have come to relish the excitement and stimulation of their new freedoms.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Is it not the case that there is no absolute need for defence work to be done by the Property Services Agency, and that, when station commanders and commanding officers have gone out locally for work, there has been greater satisfaction and much greater promptness in getting the work done, and everyone has benefited all round?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. All through the 1980s we switched work from the PSA, as a proportion of its total spend, into the hands of private contractors, consultants and architects. The Labour party never seems to understand that that gives greater opportunity to the people employed there and gives the private sector companies concerned the opportunity to sell on the international market, exploiting the procurement underwriting which they get from the British Government.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State will understand the interest in this matter in my area, where a large number of people work at RAF Kinloss. Given that, on 2 May, it was made clear at a meeting with the Whitley council that the Government view was that the PSA faced early privatisation, late privatisation or closure, what time scale does the right hon. Gentleman have in mind, and will he ensure that adequate time is given for negotiations? Wrong handling of the privatisation moves could lead to the closure of many of the PSA establishments.

Mr. Heseltine: I am deeply concerned to ensure that when the transition takes place it is conducted in a way that is as helpful as possible to people employed in the PSA. It is precisely because I have been conducting wide-ranging negotiations to bring about such an end that it has taken a little longer than it would have done if we had reached crude decisions without taking the employees into account. That we would not be prepared to do.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the great changes taking place in the Ministry of Defence and the rundown of bases in the United Kingdom, coupled with the fact that, for some time, the Royal Air Force has given station commanders budgets which they never had before, have meant that the role of the PSA has changed substantially? It is therefore correct that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues should look at it carefully, because if they did not do so the stations, the military and those employed by the PSA might not benefit.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend fully understands why the Government must take proper care in this matter. That is what we are doing.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question. I have to have regard to the fact that there is a statement to come and then an important Northern Ireland debate. I will take two more questions from each side and then move on.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does the Secretary of State recall that it was I who exposed breaches of EC and GATT rules while the Government were privatising the Crown Suppliers and the furnishing division, Crown Furnishings? What is meant precisely by the part of the letter which refers to:

"The handling of redundancies, EC state aids and other considerations"?

How is that connected with the dowry? May we have an assurance that there will be no breach of EC regulations or directives or of GATT rulings in this case—so that what we had to expose on a previous occasion does not happen again?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to the part that he claims to have played in an earlier case. While I do my best to keep my eye on what is proceeding——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Answer the question.

Mr. Heseltine: I am about to answer it. I do my best to keep in touch with what is happening within the broad areas of my responsibility, but the role played by the hon. Gentleman had escaped me. I have therefore learnt something this afternoon—a rare event when standing at the Dispatch Box listening to the Labour party.

The hon. Gentleman has read from a letter by a Treasury Minister. One thing about Treasury Ministers is that they are extremely literate, so he ought to be able to understand what they are saying.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Has my right hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to read some of the Public Accounts Committee reports and some of the National Audit Office reports on the PSA? I refer, for instance, to a report on the management of the civil estate, published in 1988, to a National Audit Office report on the new headquarters for the Department of Energy published in 1990, and to the new building for the British Library report published in 1990. Does he agree that all those reports present a sorry tale of time slippage and cost overruns which warrant winding up this agency, and that the sooner that is done, the better for the taxpayer? Is not the letter about which there has been such a furore the normal, common-sense commercial practice that any company would follow when considering the sale of such an organisation?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will understand that when I was responsible for the PSA as Secretary of State for the Environment from 1979 to 1983, and one of its principal customers as Secretary of State for Defence from 1983 to 1986, the reports to which he refers were almost bedside reading. Anyone in the offices that I held did not need such reports to draw his attention to the problems associated with the employment of more than 20,000 people in the construction industry. There is no effective way in which we are likely to be able to secure value for money for the taxpayer or the delivery of adequate service to customers within such an arrangement. That is why we have taken these decisions and are moving in the direction that we have outlined.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that, if a private contractor sought to sell a subsidiary which was known to be a loss maker in such a way as to deceive the purchaser, that contractor would be prosecuted? What difference does it make if the Department of the Environment seeks to do the same?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is making mischief. My Department has not the slightest intention to deceive anybody. We are trying to find the best possible deal for the taxpayer and for employees of the PSA.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is no better way to motivate a work force than to give them a stake in the company in which they work? That being so, does he further agree that, for years, the PSA has been a shambles and badly needs the sorting out that private industry would achieve? I know that privatisation is only one of the options, but will my right hon. Friend consider it favourably because it would be in the interests of the work force and the taxpayer?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct. The only issue is how we move from where we are to where we want to arrive. The serious responsibilities which flow from this process involve the protection of taxpayers' money, the secure delivery of service to customers of the PSA and a proper regard for the interests of the employees.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some of us were on the Committee tape.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Well, I know. I heard the hon. Gentleman.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No, I will take points of order after the statement.

Local Authority Housing Estates

3.43 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the housing action trust and estate action programmes, through which the Government are tackling the problems of rundown local authority estates.

Too many people are still trapped in unattractive, uninspired local authority housing. Considerable progress has been made, but we need to do more. With the thrust of our policy to transfer development of new social housing to housing associations, local authorities should now be able to concentrate on renovation of the existing stock. I am pleased to announce today a further advance in our long-term strategy to upgrade this accommodation.

Yesterday, the House approved the order for establishment of the North Hull housing action trust, and the order will be considered in another place later today. Meanwhile, as hon. Members may be aware, Liverpool city council and the London borough of Tower Hamlets, Bow neighbourhood, have forwarded proposals for the establishment of such trusts in their areas. Other authorities are also expressing interest, and the time has therefore come for the Government to set out their guidelines for future use of housing action trust powers.

The House will also recall that, earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced the enhancement of the estate action programme, with additional resources this year and with a wider remit to focus in particular on more comprehensive proposals for the regeneration for seriously rundown local authority estates.

These steps reflect the importance that we attach to efforts to regenerate rundown estates. In the last five years, resources available for the estate action programme have risen from £45 million to £268 million and through the renovation of 300,000 dwellings it has already made a successful contribution to turning round severely rundown estates. I believe that the housing action trust programme, on its new firm footing, can also play a valuable role.

It is important, however, that the two programmes and the other instruments available should complement each other, should fit the wide range of problems confronting local authorities in such areas, and should promote an effective partnership between central Government, local government and tenants.

I am therefore publishing today, for issue to authorities next week, the new guidelines under which we shall consider proposals for the establishment of housing action trusts and for estate action schemes, and I am inviting bids from local authorities for next year's programmes. Within both programmes, the first priority must be to engage the support of tenants and offer them new hope.

We must also look to authorities to propose solutions to problems of estate structure, design and layout, poor management, and lack of housing choice and economic opportunity. They will be able to build on examples such as the major estate action schemes at Cowgate in Newcastle and Netherley in Liverpool, and work already under way for the North Hull housing action trust. Finally, it is essential to ensure the best possible deployment of skills and resources on a long-term basis for regeneration in such areas.

[Sir George Young]

I shall deal first with the revised guidelines for estate action. Part of the programme will continue to fund small-scale projects on estates, addressed to particular problematical features of such estates or areas within them. That will help the smaller authorities and those with less obvious but important problems.

However, most of the resources will be deployed to tackle the larger and more severely rundown estates in a comprehensive way. For such schemes, the guidelines will require that all practical steps have been taken to involve the private sector, and that large-scale capital investment is complemented by effective housing management, at both the estate and the authority level, to improve service to tenants and to ensure that capital resources are not wasted. The guidelines will require, too, that the proposals result from a full economic appraisal of options for the estate, and complement the authority's overall strategy for its stock.

Some areas, however, will be so severely rundown and present such exceptional problems that they are likely to be beyond the resources and capacity of the local authority, even with the support of the estate action and other programmes. This is where we believe housing action trusts can now play a key role. It will therefore now be open to all local authorities to put forward bids against the public expenditure resources available, since expected commitments in Hull and Waltham Forest are not expected to absorb more than one third of existing provision.

For such proposals the criteria will be as follows. First, the area should have a high level of social, economic and environmental problems—for example, high unemployment, dependency on state benefits, and a high incidence of crime and vandalism.

Secondly, the area should have problems requiring very costly renovation, redevelopment and improved management, and which it is beyond the capacity of the local authority to tackle. Thirdly, it should be a coherent geographical area, within an area of considerable housing demand, containing a large concentration of poor-quality public sector housing—that is, between 2,000 and 10,000 dwellings.

Finally, the area should have empty properties or land available to accommodate tenants during renovation or development works.

The scheme should be beyond the ordinary resources of the local authority, should stand to benefit from the injection of external skills and resources, and should be best pursued through a special body involving a partnership of the local authority, central Government and tenants.

Finally, there should be a good prospect that the proposal will enjoy the support of both the local authority and the tenants, and a trust should be as cost-effective a way of pursuing the scheme as any other policy instrument.

I commend the guidelines to the House. I believe that they will enable us to build upon the success of the estate action programme and the progress that we are now making with housing action trusts. They should also provide a basis on which central and local government, with the active involvement and support of tenants, can work together over the coming years to eliminate the worst concentrations of rundown local authority housing.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): This is a significant change in Government policy, and I give it a general welcome. It is a significant change not least because, for the first time, a Minister recognises that a coherent strategy is needed. The problem with the previous Secretary of State and his Ministers was that policy was changed from time to time so that we never knew whether we were supposed to be encouraging housing action trusts, estate action programmes, or whatever.

It is right to link good management with resources and tenant participation. It was not clear from the Minister's statement, so I ask him to make it clear later, that, especially in housing action trust areas, not only tenants but other residents are involved. We want to ensure that tenants and residents in housing action trust areas are involved in the planning, as many of their democratic rights under the local authority structure are taken away by the HAT quango.

During our proceedings on the Housing Act 1988, the Labour party proposed each and every one of the changes that the Government have announced today, but all our amendments were voted down by the Government. Now that the Government have accepted the general position that they consistently opposed then, will they confirm, as the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), appeared to do in Committee yesterday, that tenants will have an absolute right to choose their own landlords in future—and not just to go back to the council but to go back to it without the council losing funds?

That is vital. Previous Ministers said that primary legislation was needed for that. We want to be clear whether that is a right for tenants or merely something that can be done at the whim of Ministers, who on average do not stay in the job for much more than six months, as the experience of the past three or four years has shown.

Can we have some guarantees for tenants, not only in respect of rent levels, but in respect of the rent-setting mechanism? Will they be involved in the discussions about what rent levels will be, given that different standards of housing will emerge at the end of the development programme?

Can we have some guarantees also on the right of succession for tenants, which they can lose or have watered down by the assured tenancy proposal and, similarly, on the right to buy? Both are important.

Can we have a guarantee that anyone who applies for a housing action trust in particular will have significant number of tenants and/or residents on the board, and that the chair of the organisation will enjoy the support of local people and will not be a Whitehall appointee as the arrangements have unfortunately provided.

When the Government set up the housing action trust system, they identified seven areas which they said were desperately in need of money and, as I recall, set aside £180 million for those areas. Those areas consistently said no, either in Government-organised votes or in tenant-organised votes. Will those areas now be able to bid under the new system, given that it was the tenants' resistance, more than any other factor—certainly more than my intervention on behalf of the Labour party—that forced the Government to change course? Will they be given the

opportunity to come back for the money that was taken away from them when they did not do what the previous Secretary of State wanted and vote to opt out of council control?

Finally, will the Minister make it clear that existing estate action programmes will be able to continue? My reading of his statement is that they will, but it would help if he would clarify the matter.

Sir George Young: I am grateful for the welcome that the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has given for the proposals, although I must point out that it is not the Government but Labour Members who are shifting their position on housing action trusts.

Of course we should consult residents in the areas concerned. We are talking of local authority estates that are severely run down, and a feature of them is that there has not been a lot of exercise of the right to buy. Where people have bought, however, they are entitled to participate in the work of the housing action trust.

We have made it quite clear that if, at the end of the housing action trust period, the tenants want to return to their local authority landlord, we shall make the resources available to the local authority to enable it to reacquire the properties. I repeat that commitment.

On rent levels, of course tenants want to know, before voting for HATs, roughly what the deal is. In the two specific recent cases, tenants have been told that there will be no increases until the improvements have taken place and that, thereafter, rents will rise broadly to the level of other local authority rents in the area. Within those parameters, it is for the HAT to develop the policy once it has been set up.

I can confirm that the right to buy is carried through and that there is no prejudice to that right in voting for a housing action trust. It will be carried through on the same terms.

We have consulted leaders of tenants associations before appointing shadow chairmen and other members of the housing action trusts and in Waltham Forest and Hull, I understand that the shadow chairmen are acceptable both to tenants and to local councillors. We propose to continue with that model. We are prepared to appoint up to half of the members of a HAT from local people, either councillors or tenants.

On those estates that voted no, mischievous propaganda was circulated encouraging people to vote in that way. Some of those estates now regret that they were misled. However, they will be eligible to resubmit for a HAT, although they will have to accept that there will be other bidders in the field, whereas previously they had a fairly clear round.

If the hon. Gentleman really wants to help local authority tenants living on those estates, he and his Front-Bench colleagues should urge the tenants in Waltham Forest—who start voting on Saturday—to vote for a HAT. If Labour Members were to do that, it would help people who, I think, we all want to help.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): My hon. Friend is to be warmly congratulated on his statement and on the success of the estate action programme, which he founded about eight years ago when he was previously a Minister in the Department of the Environment. Is he aware that the HAT programme is now being successfully revived because he is integrating the tenants and the local authorities, which unfortunately was not the case previously?

Sir George Young: The Government are anxious that HATs should be set up with the support of local government and local residents. If we want to develop a successful model, we need the goodwill of all parties concerned. The Government are now anxious to work as hard as possible to ensure that, where HATs are proposed, that is done on the basis of collaboration and partnership. We do not want any of the adversarial politics that, sadly, were injected into some of the earlier proposals, mainly by people who were politically dogmatic and committed against HATs.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I welcome the proposals. Is the Minister aware that nowhere in the guidelines that he has issued is there any reference to public or recreational spaces? Will he issue guidelines to local authorities, especially on footage for each person? Will he examine the systems of heating? Is it to be the prerogative of the individuals, rather than the board, to control the heating systems?

Sir George Young: It would be against the philosophy of HATs, which are essentially about pushing down decisions to the local people, if the Government were to be too dogmatic about how central heating systems were run on estates. We are anxious that energy efficiency should be an important component within the estate action programmes and within HATs. Every opportunity should be taken to insulate the properties and to ensure that tenants who occupy them have their heating bills reduced because of energy efficient schemes.

On the question of open spaces, some of the most successful estate action programmes have embodied the demarcation of certain land—for example, close to the tower blocks—and attributing it specifically to a tower block rather than leaving it as general open space. Many of the other programmes have allocated space on the ground floor to those living on the ground floor, which has given them some privacy and defensible open space. We are anxious that large open spaces, which are often unused, should be put to better use both in HATs and in the estate action programme.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): The proposals sound both vigorous and challenging. They are necessary, and should be widely welcomed. In those interesting proposals, is there any equation with the vexed and damaging problem of non-payment of rent? That is spreading in certain areas, and somehow or other it should be dealt with concomitant with these proposals.

Sir George Young: Part of our proposal is to devolve housing management down to particular estates. We are promoting estate management boards under the estate action programme. There is every sign that, where local people are involved in the management of their estate, there are fewer voids, fewer squatters, and a better rent collection record.

With HATs, tenants will be on the board, making decisions. They will know that, the more rent that is collected, the more resources can be put back into the estate. That is a far better model for reducing rent arrears than an often impersonal, remote and out-of-touch local

[Sir George Young]

authority management, who simply do not have the same incentive to collect the rents and plough them back into the estates.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister cut through all the jargon and offer some specific hope to some of my constituents? He will be aware that the tenants on the Lancashire Hill estate and the Stockport local authority bid for money to be allocated under the design improvement controlled initiative scheme for work to be done on their estate. Unfortunately, Professor Coleman, who seemed to run the programme rather more than the Department did, insulted many of my constituents and finally decided not to go ahead with the scheme after a great deal of preparatory work had been done by the Stockport local authority. Can the Minister now say that money will be available for the Lancashire Hill flats under the programme that he is talking about today?

Sir George Young: Of course, the local authority can apply under the estate action programme for a programme of improvements. I regret if any offence was caused by Professor Coleman, but the programme which she is supervising, which I think amounts to some £50 million, is monitored and approved by Ministers and we are taking a close interest in the development of the research. We are interested in her findings on the relationship between the design of estates and factors such as vandalism, rent arrears, graffiti and so on.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Will my hon. Friend admit that he has tried several schemes recently and that each time he has come up against the solid brick wall of a Labour-controlled housing committee? When, in Southampton on a former scheme, we had to obtain a percentage of the votes to get tower block tenants to take over a new management programme, the Labour group sent out a tremendous amount of misinformation, and there was a lot of scaremongering about the rise in rents. Is my hon. Friend not relying too much on the co-operation that he is expecting to get? I can say here and now that, in Southampton, which has the worst-maintained tower blocks in the south of England, he will get little or no co-operation, and he will certainly be seeing once again the leaflets of misinformation.

Sir George Young: Realism is breaking out within the Labour party, if not in Southampton certainly in other parts of the country. As the House well knows, in Hull the Labour-controlled council supported the proposal to set up HATs. It urged its own tenants to vote yes. Other Labour-controlled local authorities, such as Liverpool, are approaching the Government to see whether we will set up HATs in their areas. The new enlightened approach may not yet have filtered south to Southampton, but other Labour-controlled areas realise the advantages of Government policy—that our new housing initiatives offer their tenants and themselves fresh ways of tackling problems. At the end of the day, if the tenants in Southampton do not like their present landlord, under tenants' choice they are perfectly free today of this week to choose another landlord, an approved landlord. They can vote to transfer to a housing association if they feel that a housing association would give them a better deal than Southampton council.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Is the Minister aware that any increased or more effective expenditure on improving estates is always welcome, particularly since, during the past 12 years, the Government have robbed local authorities of hundreds of millions of pounds which should have been spent on improving estates? Will he assure the House that he will not force local authorities to spend money at the whim of the Department of the Environment and that he will allow local democracy to prevail?

When the Minister talks so glibly about housing choice, does he recognise that the only real way to provide adequate housing choice is to give local authorities the opportunity once again to build council housing at reasonable rents? That would allow the thousands of people in Bradford in my constituency who are on the waiting list and are desperately in need of housing to get the housing denied them by Government policies?

Sir George Young: I think that the hon. Gentleman was present for Environment questions today, when I made it clear that we expected the housing association movement rather than the local authority to build new homes for rent. There is no compulsion on local authorities to bid for estate action. However, the Department usually finds that it is over-subscribed. That has been our experience with the urban programme, city challenge and estate action. Local authorities are eager to apply for resources under the scheme brought forward by the Government. If a local authority does not wish to bid, it will have to explain to its tenants why it has not taken advantage of the schemes that I have announced today.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The news that my hon. Friend has given the House is very welcome. I join him in hoping that the friendliness demonstrated by the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), will also be shown by Labour councillors and Labour party supporters in residents associations, so that we shall not encounter again the mischief that was caused in London on the last occasion that housing action trusts were talked about by the Government. The policy outlined in my hon. Friend's statement deals with groups of housing dereliction, but I am worried about isolated properties that so often are wilfully kept empty by councils. They must be brought back into use to house the homeless.

Sir George Young: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I very much hope that Opposition Members will rethink their opposition to housing action trusts. A housing action trust is set up only when tenants vote for it. If tenants do not want a housing action trust, they need not have it. To oppose a housing action trust dogmatically is to deny resources to tenants who are living on the worst local authority estates and, moreover, to deny them the opportunity to participate in the management of those estates and in decision making. It is a denial of choice and democracy. I therefore hope that Opposition Members will think again.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I hope that local authorities that have voids will apply to the Department—under the £300 million homelessness initiative, by means of which resources can be made available—to bring them back into use, if that would cost more than local authorities would normally be able to spend out of their housing investment programmes.

Alternatively, they can homestead the properties. They can make them available to people on the waiting list, or to people with the necessary skills who want to move and who are prepared to move into the properties and modernise them. The local authority then gets a rent, its property is improved and somebody is housed. I hope that local authorities will look again at the advantages of homesteading.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Minister consider what can be done about private estates where the builder has gone bankrupt and left a legacy of unmade roads and causeways, and play areas that are a cross between an adventure playground and a tip? The local authority is unable to deal with them. It needs help with refurbishment, if it is to assist the people who are living on those estates.

Sir George Young: I commend the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity in bringing private estates into the debate. If he will let me have details of the particular estate that he has in mind, I shall see whether there is anything that can be done. If planning permission was given for an estate, on the basis that certain roads would be built, the local authority may be able to take action in default and reclaim——

Mr. McKay: The builder and developer is bankrupt and has now disappeared.

Sir George Young: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me have the details. I shall then see whether there is any way through.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I support what the Minister is trying to do, but I urge a little caution, having lived through any number of these schemes as a member of Westminster city council's housing committee. I saw the end product. The experience that I gained there leads me to believe that most tenants to not want to become involved actively in these democratic organisations. They want a private landlord, or just a good landlord. One way to achieve that is to bring in the private sector, even to the extent of selling off blocks of properties on certain terms. That would allow the private owner, or landlord, to do the work. I have seen some excellent schemes in docklands, carried out by Barratts. There are also some very good examples in Wandsworth. I am sure that Westminster's housing officials, with their great experience, would be happy to pass on some very good tips.

Sir George Young: I am interested in what my hon. Friend says. There is an important principle: whether to allow tenants to decide whether or not their landlord should change, or whether to do that for them or to them. The Government's view is that before one proposes that the landlord should be changed from a local authority to a housing action trust, the tenants should be told about the proposal and have the opportunity to vote upon it. If one is going to ask them to vote, one must explain what is proposed.

Although it may take longer and although one runs the risk of a "no" vote, it is better to try to obtain the support of the tenants than to impose the change on them. Having been to Waltham Forest and to Hull to meet the tenants, I was greatly encouraged by the interest shown in the housing action trust by people living on the estates and by their commitment to it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Minister confirm that that does not apply to the privately rented sector, although some of the worst cases involve private landlords? However, I should not expect the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) to recognise that. Why is tenants' choice only for private tenants, not for public sector tenants?

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) spoke about the need for new council house building. Will the Minister bear it in mind that, during the past 10 to 12 years, there has been a substantial reduction in the publicly rented sector and that the Government have been determined that no new council houses should be built to replace those which have been sold? That is part of the problem.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman should know the answer to the substantive point at the beginning of his question. The Government have a mandate for properties that have been built with taxpayers' money, but not for properties that have been built privately. That is why we have extended the right to buy to public sector tenants, but not to private sector tenants.

As for the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, we dealt with the issue during the 45 minutes of Environment questions. The hon. Gentleman knows that it is Government policy for housing associations to provide new, socially affordable housing.

Points of Order

4.17 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The private notice question dealt with a general subject: unlike most private notice questions, it raised issues related to many constituencies. The Government refused to make a statement, so the Opposition's only option was to put down a private notice question. You restricted it to about 16 minutes, which is a very short time for a private notice question, although I understand what a tremendously difficult job you have. Only four hon. Members were left standing, so it would not have intruded greatly on the business of the day if we had been called——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me stop the hon. Gentleman there. I have to make difficult judgments. I nearly suggested to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that I would trade his ten-minute Bill for four further questions. However, the hon. Gentleman is saying that I should call those hon. Members who are here now to the detriment of those who want to speak later. The Ulster Members get very little time in the House and they constantly complain—and rightly so—that their debates are squeezed. I have an absolute obligation to protect their interests.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about the fact that the private notice question followed the theft of a letter. We heard the Secretary of State make it clear that it was a storm in a teacup—indeed, one must question the motives of the BBC in leading this morning's bulletin with the story. The granting of the private notice question means that people will not be discouraged from stealing Government letters.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to make such points, but theft, as the Secretary of State said, is always reprehensible. But in granting the private notice question today that is not the criterion that I used. If such an issue is being widely discussed outside, surely it is right that we hear about it on the Floor of the House from the Secretary of State.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will say to those hon. Members who are rising—I know what they are going to say—that we are taking time out of the Ulster debate. We have business questions tomorrow and next week there will almost certainly be an Opposition day. There will be a debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill at some stage, so there will be plenty of other opportunities to raise this issue. It is very unfair on the Ulster Members to take time out of their debate today.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This point of order relates to Question Time, and it is not related to the other point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I will take the point of order.

Mr. Cryer: During questions, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that there was no truth in my claim that the Department of the Environment had sent to local authorities lists of institutions authorised by the Bank of England. I have checked with the Library, and I have discovered that the Department of the Environment sent out quarterly returns which included the lists——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Even if the Department has, it is not a matter of order for me.

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot be held responsible for answers given to questions. I have no knowledge of that matter. Goodness me, I should be on my feet all the time if I were called on to adjudicate on whether what was said here was right or wrong.

Mr. Cryer: But, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Well, I would.

Mr. Cryer: It is naturally a matter of order that Ministers should tell the truth.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must find another way of raising the matter.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has it been communicated to you, Mr. Speaker, whether the Government intend to make a full statement about the position of the 24 local authorities, including my own authority of Allerdale, which have lent the Bank of Credit and Commerce International at least £30 million, and about the position of the further 20 local authorities that are about to surface to reveal that they too have lent substantial sums? The list to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred has on it two banks, Chancery plc and Edington plc, which have been the subject of administration orders within the past six months. They remain on the list, and the list is misleading local authorities. I wonder whether we can have a statement——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have had no request for a statement about the matter, but we had a statement on Monday. I should have thought that it would be a good subject to raise on the Consolidated Fund Bill or on a Supply day.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you will be aware, the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991" was issued yesterday. Page 73, says that there will be no continuing need for quality assurance within the Ministry of Defence. You know from the many questions that I have asked in the House that I have been trying to move the quality assurance unit from Woolwich in south London to my constituency. Yet today and yesterday, I have been unable to obtain from the Ministry of Defence any definitive statement on the future of the unit. May we have a statement on the matter?

Mr. Speaker: I am concerned with quality control in the Chamber. I cannot help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), Mr. Speaker. I do not want to challenge the Chair. However, it is significant when the hon. Members for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) and for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) cynically exploit the position of BCCI. That was compounded by the Parliamentary

Under-Secretary of State for the Environment giving a falsehood to the House. I know that it was a falsehood, because I have the documents here——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members not to pursue the matter. They should reflect that, but for the Chair, they would not have had even the private notice question. The hon. Gentleman should sit down, please. Let us get on.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: No further points of order.

Mr. Sumberg: Well, I was mentioned.

Mr. Speaker: My God, yes, you were.

Mr. Sumberg: It would be in order and keep up the quality of the Chamber, which I know that you are anxious to do, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) were not allowed to refer to cynicism on my part in mentioning the point in Question Time. I made the point wholly on behalf of my constituents who have lost £6·5 million because of the Labour council in Bury.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that we shall return to the subject.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 4) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1533) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Scottish Grand Committee

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland).

That the Matter of the Scottish economy, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland).

That the Matter of housing in Scotland, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Ancient Forests

4.23 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to designate areas of ancient forest within the United Kingdom in connection with the arrangements of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation for declaring World Heritage Sites; to make provision for the conservation and regeneration of such areas of ancient forest; and for connected purposes.

The Bill asusumes an added urgency with the statement this morning in Edinburgh by an old friend of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who has done me the courtesy of being present, and myself, Professor Sir Frederick Holliday. He stated:

"Last Thursday, I saw Mr. Trippier and asked him to seek a new Chairman for the JNCC. I outlined to him my reasons for believing that I could best serve the interests of nature conservation in Britain by vacating the post of independent Chairman. I urged that my going be used as an opportunity for the three Departments of State concerned to review:

(a) the role of the JNCC following EPA and SNH legislation;

(b) the way in which Governments expected to see the role discharged;

(c) the administrative and financial framework deemed appropriate for the associated tasks.

I said that I would make this short statement today. After discussion I agreed to add a further sentence to say that the Minister intended to let my proposal lie upon the table until he consulted further. Whilst I remained of the same mind, I agreed to Mr. Trippier's suggestion. I also agreed not to elaborate further at this stage."

When the independent chairman of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, a distinguished marine biologist, lately vice-chancellor of the university of Durham, and much else resigns, on a matter of principle, Ministers should take notice that something is wrong.

My Bill is really the "For Pity's Sake, Please Do Something About Mar Lodge Before It Is Too Late Bill" or the "We Hope That The Environment Secretary Will Put Into Practice What He So Eloquently Expressed on 5 March 1980 Bill". Mar Lodge gives him a litmus test opportunity to do so. In an Adjournment debate, quoting the right hon. Gentleman in extenso—the general case has never been more eloquently put—the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said:

"we give special protection to particularly important sites of . . . nature conservation or special scientific interest . . . we . . . need to consider decisions too from an international as well as a national standpoint."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. 437.]

Exactly. If we in Britain cannot ourselves protect Mar Lodge and the remnants of the Caledonian forest on the southern Cairngorms, we had better belt up about telling Governments in Brasilia, Kinshasa or Kuala Lumpur how they should go about protecting their rain forests.

I address myself to the Department of the Environment because, frankly, I despair of the Scottish Office. This, incidentally, is the explanation for any English hon. Member vexed at being kept out of his bed on Monday night until the Government Chief Whip had to move the closure—incidentally, that action is almost unprecedented in respect of a Lords amendment—and why there is a need for an Ancient Forests Bill.

In the debate on 19 June, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland agreed with the international importance of the Mar Lodge estate, but expressed Her Majesty's Government's view that private ownership, with a

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

management agreement, is, in general, the best approach to the management of Scotland's natural heritage. The Minister expected that, by management agreements, the objectives of conservation could be combined with the interests of the taxpayer. The recent Glenlochay case does not support that conclusion.

In the Glenlochay case, Mr. John Cameron bought the estate in 1986 for about £570,000, knowing full well of the existing sites of special scientific interest and aware that a recent proposal for afforestation affecting the SSSIs had been refused by the Forestry Commission on the advice of the Nature Conservancy Council. Shortly after purchase, Mr. Cameron submitted a claim for about £1 million for "profit forgone", which my colleagues know is the cost of a management agreement under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Indeed, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) will know exactly what we are getting at, because the hon. Gentleman—faithful Sir Hector—could not, at 2.30 in the morning, bring himself to vote for his own Government, because he knew and cared something about it. That is the extent to which the Government are wrong.

The NCC opposed Mr. Cameron's forestry and agricultural proposals that affected the SSSIs. Finally, after a land tribunal decision, Mr. Cameron was awarded a cool £555,000, which, with added interest and costs, will set the taxpayer back by close to £1 million.

In the light of the Glenlochay experience, it would clearly have been far cheaper to acquire the estate for the nation outright. Albeit that there have been changes purporting to plug the loopholes in forestry taxation and compensation, the fact remains that many other practices can command huge sums in compensation. Mr. Cameron was within the law—just—but it is an abuse of the system.

Mar Lodge provides a valid parallel. Regrettably, management agreements with a variety of private owners, geared to the supposed interests of the taxpayer, have failed to conserve the Caledonian forest's natural character and simply will not meet either the conservation requirements or the demands of the taxpayer, which cannot be open-ended.

Like many of my colleagues, I believe that the compulsory purchase of Mar Lodge on behalf of the nation is now called for and that the world property market, with its vagaries, is no way to protect Mar Lodge or our living treasures.

That is not a maverick view. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) will well recollect that Dr. Martin Holdgate, who was the late Tony Crosland's favourite adviser and is now the director general of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, has written to the Secretary of State suggesting the purchase of Mar Lodge for conservation purposes, and that it be run by SNH. As my hon. Friend the member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) knows, when Dr. Holdgate suggests that, it is not a maverick view.

I cannot discuss motives, although I personally would give the Minister, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) the benefit of the doubt that the original motive was not deceit, but what has happened since is deceit, because the position has been made far worse as a result of that infamous clause 11 being inserted at the last minute in the House of Lords.

I shall tell the Minister the story in potted form. There was a row over the flow country and a bad press conference. The present Secretary of State for Transport then thought that he could kill two birds with one stone —that he could appease the Scots at little cost and extend the domain of the Scottish Office. Therefore, there was an agreement with the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). Then, after the House had given something totally different a Second Reading—and after we had spent many hours in Committee on a totally different proposition—at the 11th hour and the 59th minute, clause 11 was inserted.

That clause might have been bombed out by the House of Commons Public Bill Office. It is extremely doubtful whether the Lords should have accepted it, because it fundamentally altered the nature of the Bill. It was sneaked into the Lords, and even Lord Patrick Gibson, who is only the ex-chairman of the National Trust, knew nothing about it. A cosy little circle in the Lords got together and, against the advice of Lord Cranbrook, who is the Government's own head of the English Nature Conservancy Council——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please bring his speech to a close?

Mr. Dalyell: Finally, the Government should reflect on this matter and, in the light of what happened this morning, with the resignation of Sir Frederick Holliday, should put the whole thing on ice and go back to the drawing board.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tam Dalyell, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, Mr. George Foulkes, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Dr. Norman A. Godman, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. John McFall, Mr. David Marshall, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. Gavin Strang and Mr. Brian Wilson.

Ancient Forests

Mr. Tam Dalyell accordingly presented a Bill to designate areas of ancient forest within the United Kingdom in connection with the arrangements of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation for declaring World Heritage Sites; to make provision for the conservation and regeneration of such areas of ancient forest; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 19 July and to be printed. [Bill 214.]

Mr. Speaker: We come now to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Regulations.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Not moved.

Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Speaker: Before we start on the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, it might be helpful if I repeat to the House what I have said before from the Chair in these debates. The debate on this order may cover all matters for which Northern Ireland Departments, as distinct from the Northern Ireland Office, are responsible. Police and security are the principal excluded subjects.

4.35 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 11th June, be approved.

The draft order, which covers the main estimates for Northern Ireland Departments, authorises expenditure of £2,735 million for the current financial year. Taken together with the amount already voted on account, this brings the total estimates provision for Northern Ireland Departments to £4,676 million, an increase of 9 per cent. on 1990-91 provisional outturn. The order also authorises the use of additional receipts to meet an excess vote in 1989-90. The sums sought for individual services are set out in the estimates booklet, which is, as usual, available from the Vote Office.

The provision contained in these estimates needs to be set in the context of Northern Ireland's recent economic performance. Northern Ireland has, to a large extent, escaped the worst effects of the recession. However, the local economy is beginning to be affected by the downturn in economic activity at national level, with unemployment having increased by 3,100 over the past six months. This increase is regrettable, but it is much less pronounced than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Despite the recent fall in the total numbers of people in work, the trend in employment remains upward. Moreover, output in Northern Ireland's industries in the first quarter of 1991 was up by 2 per cent. compared with the same period a year earlier. The local economy is therefore displaying remarkable resilience. Government will continue to do all that they can to assist Northern Ireland industry to improve its efficiency and competitiveness, so that it is well placed to take advantage of the economic upturn.

I now turn to the estimates themselves. As is customary on these occasions I shall concentrate on the main items, starting with the Department of Agriculture. The net provision sought in the two agricultural votes amounts to some £148 million, an increase of £4·5 million over 1990-91. Vote I covers expenditure of £31 million on various market support schemes which operate on a national basis. This includes £15 million for farm improvements and grants to stimulate investment on farms and £16 million is to provide support for farming in the less-favoured areas, by means of payments on hill cattle and sheep.

Vote II seeks provision of £116 million for local agricultural, fisheries and forestry services and support measures. Of this, £48 million is for agricultural, scientific and veterinary services, reflecting the importance of maintaining the highest possible quality of Northern Ireland agricultural produce; £27 million is for arterial drainage, fisheries and forestry.

A sum of £1 million is sought for a new initiative on rural development. This will provide for payments to community bodies to promote regeneration projects in the most deprived rural areas of Northern Ireland. A rural development council, which will promote local community initiatives and advise the Department on rural development policies is being set up. I know that Northern Ireland Members will welcome that development.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): In the sum that is allocated for rural development will funds be made available to those who require a decent road from where they live to a main road?

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall discuss the Department of the Environment and the amount of money set aside for roads in a moment.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Government respond tonight to the MacSharry proposals and how they will affect expenditure on agriculture? I am sure that the Minister is aware that the farming community is greatly alarmed about the proposals from Europe. If those proposals are carried out many farmers could be put out of full-time farming.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman made his point well, but the key to the answer lies in his words: "if those proposals are carried out". As I understand it, they are simply proposals at the moment and therefore it is unlikely that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), will want to address them in the abstract tonight. However, the Government have noted the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Surely the Minister does not expect to get away with that. The Government are bound to make some response to the MacSharry proposals, so when can we expect it?

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall make clear to the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), the hon. Gentleman's concern. No doubt as soon as he is able to do so, he will respond to the substantive part of the hon. Gentleman's question.

The Department of Economic Development's vote 1 seeks provision for £212 million. That will enable the Industrial Development Board to carry out its role of encouraging industrial development in Northern Ireland, which includes assistance to the aircraft and shipbuilding industries. Last December, the board published its forward strategy for the period to 1993. That sets out how the IDB will respond to the challenges of the early 1990s and outlines the assistance that it can offer to companies. The IDB is encouraging the location and development of internationally competitive companies in the manufacturing and tradeable service sectors in Northern Ireland, to create the conditions for growth in durable employment.

In the Department of Economic Development's vote 2, some £40 million is sought for the local enterprise development unit, LEDU, Northern Ireland's small business agency. Hon. Members will be pleased to hear that, in the past financial year, LEDU promoted almost 7,000 jobs. That was 16 per cent. above target and some 1,000 more than the previous year's record result. That is

[Dr. Mawhinney]

a very heartening performance and brings the total number of jobs promoted by LEDU since its establishment in 1971 to more than 50,000.

Also in vote 2, £5·5 million is sought for the Northern Ireland tourist board, to promote the further development of the tourist industry in Northern Ireland and to enable the board to market Northern Ireland more effectively.

The Department of Economic Development's vote 3 covers expenditure of £172 million by the Training and Employment Agency, an increase of £6 million over 1990-91. The sum of £31 million is sought for the youth training programme to provide 8,000 places and to meet the guarantee given by the Government of a training place for every unemployed young person under 18. A sum of £53 million is for the action for community employment programme, to provide almost 10,000 places for long-term unemployed adults. They will be offered the opportunity to re-enter the employment market by undertaking work of community benefit. Some £17 million is for the job training programme, an increase of £6 million over 1990-91. That will allow the programme to increase from 2,500 training places last year to around 5,000 by March 1992.

About 35,000 people are currently engaged on the various programmes provided by the Training and Employment Agency and more than 40,000 have been placed in employment since April 1990. It is encouraging also that 95 per cent. of apprentices on training centre courses, entered permanent employment on completion of their training. The agency has also undertaken a major review of mangement education and training, and introduced new arrangements into both the youth training programme and the action for community employment scheme to improve the availability and quality of training.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the Minister for showing his characteristic courtesy in giving way.

On shipbuilding, the Minister will know better than me that Harland and Wolff is one of a small number of major merchant shipbuilding yards left in the United Kingdom. Can the Minister confirm that that merchant shipbuilding yard receives financial assistance through the European Community's seventh directive on the shipbuilding intervention fund? If that money is received and where it is spent on engines, has that shipyard got the power to purchase those engines from anywhere in the world?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that he has asked a specific question arising from his deep knowledge of the subject. I believe that it will be much better if I obtain a definitive reply which I hope my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will be able to give the hon. Gentleman when he replies to the debate.

In the Department of the Environment's vote 1, £169 million is sought for roads, transport and ports. That is nearly £8 million more than last year. The sum of £139 million is for the road services programme to finance the operation and maintenance of the Province's road system and new construction and improvement works. A contract for the first phase of the Belfast cross-harbour road and rail links has just been awarded, and work is due to begin in October. The Department of the Environment vote 2 seeks £197 million for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the Minister is aware that a serious accident occurred on the rail link through my constituency last night when the second cousin of the mayor of Ballymena was killed. Later tonight, will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary be able to explain to the House why the lights on that crossing were defective on Monday and on Tuesday when the accident happened? Will the hon. Gentleman be able to give us some firm information on a matter that has stirred the community deeply? I am sure that we will all want to express our deepest sympathy to the family at this time.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman is right; the whole House would wish him to extend to the family our condolences on the tragedy in his constituency. I was not aware that the person involved was related to Alderman Spence. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will have heard the hon. Gentleman's question, but I am not sure whether, in the time available, it will be possible to provide a specific answer. If that is not possible, I am sure that my hon. Friend will write to the hon. Gentleman with the information when available.

When net borrowing by the Housing Executive to fund its capital programme, rental income and capital receipts, are taken into account, gross expenditure on the housing programme will be about £522 million, or around £18 million more than in 1990-91.

The Department of the Environment vote 3 covers water and sewerage services. Gross expenditure in 1991-92 is almost £134 million, which includes £45 million for capital and £85 million for operational and maintenance purposes. Over the next 10 to 12 years, some £500 million will be spent on the capital works programme. That will include a new water source for the greater Belfast area and the replacement of the main Belfast sewage treatment works, which was built nearly a century ago. It also covers a programme of works in compliance with European Community directives. In the first three years of the programme, some £96 million will be directed at improving the already high quality of drinking water supplies in Northern Ireland.

In DOE vote 4, £124 million is sought for environmental services, an increase of £13 million over 1990-91. That includes £40 million of urban regeneration measures targeted at areas of social, economic and environmental need. As in previous years, that will generate much higher overall investment, through the successful partnerships which have been established with the private sector. Over the life of the scheme, every £1 of grant has levered £4 of private sector money, which is an admirable record.

The estimates for the Department of Education seek a total of £1,151 million, an increase of nearly 12 per cent. over the previous year. Vote 1 includes provision of £648 million for the education and library boards to cover recurrent expenditure. Under the new arrangements for local management of schools and colleges, 80 per cent. of that will be delegated to schools and colleges and managed by them at local level. Included in the allocation to boards is £11 million to enable them to tackle a backlog of urgently required maintenance work.

The vote also provides a further £138 million to the boards to cover recurrent expenditure on other services such as libraries and youth services, and for mandatory student awards. A further £54 million is for capital projects which will enable work to start on 12 major building projects, and also provide new laboratories and technology workshops for schools, reflecting the enhanced opportunities arising from the education reforms.

Mr. Beggs: Do the estimates include an amount to overcome the alleged underfunding of the Roman Catholic-maintained school system? Many of us were deeply offended at allegations that area boards are in some way responsible for discriminating against the Roman Catholic-maintained sector. Is the Minister in a position to say whether there has been a genuine underfunding of that Church system and what will be done about it?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman is referring to one study of a number that were commissioned by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, although SACHR has not yet endorsed it. It makes certain suggestions about discrimination or lack of balance in the funding of different school systems in Northern Ireland. The assumptions that underlie the report would, by definition, be subject to question and debate by others. Nevertheless, there has been a record of historic differential in funding between schools in the maintained and controlled sectors.

However, the fact that I am not aware of suggestions that education and library boards were responsible for discrimination will be of some encouragement to the hon. Gentleman in the light of his question. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland recognised that problem some years ago. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, when he was chairman of the north-east education and library board, changes in resource allocation were introduced precisely to start to reverse that historic trend. He will also know that the introduction of local management for schools, which is a basis of funding where the money follows the pupil, will be the most effective way to deal with the problem. That is already widely recognised as a consequence of the debate that has arisen following the publication of that study.

Other expenditure in the schools sector, which is administered directly by the Department of Education, will be £128 million. That includes just over £4 million for grant-maintained integrated schools. There are now 12 integrated schools in Northern Ireland, with aggregate enrolments of 2,300 pupils. This is further welcome evidence of the growing demand from parents that their children should be educated alongside children of other denominations. The recent Northern Ireland social attitudes survey showed that 58 per cent. of Protestants and 67 per cent. of Roman Catholics support integrated education.

In the Department of Education's vote 2, £153 million is sought, of which £87 million is to enable Northern Ireland's universities to maintain parity of provision with comparable universities in the rest of the United Kingdom. This vote also provides the necessary funds for a range of youth, sport, community and cultural activities. In particular, it makes provision of £2·4 million for grants and payments by the Department of Education for the improvement of community relations.

Mr. Beggs: Will funding be available to recognise the community schools that have been established in Northern Ireland, and to provide the necessary funding to enable schools under LMS to keep a community tutor on the payroll?

Dr. Mawhinney: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is referring to matters included in the education reform order. The Department will want to discuss those with schools that might want to become community schools.

The next set of votes relates to the Department of Health and Social Services. In votes 1 and 3, total net provision of £1,052 million is sought for health and social services. That is an increase of 10 per cent. over last year and will sustain the standard of the Province's health and personal social services. Spending on the family health services will be over £223 million, an increase of £21 million over 1990-91. Some £837 million is for health and social services boards current expenditure, and £51 million is for capital development, to maintain a substantial programme of major and minor works, including £11 million for Antrim hospital. Those allocations will support the Government's reform programme and allow further progress in a number of priority areas, including improved services for the disabled.

Hon. Members will be aware that it is intended to establish a child support agency in Northern Ireland as part of the Government's plans to ensure that absent parents meet their responsibilities for the care and upbringing of their children. In addition, one of the six British regional centres required for the administration of child support work will also be located in Northern Ireland. That welcome development will create 550 new jobs in Belfast. A supplementary estimate to cover the costs of preparatory work in this area will be brought before the House later in the year.

Vote 4 provides £1,106 million for social security benefits, an increase of more than 12 per cent. over last year. Some £491 million is for income support; £170 million for housing benefit and £14 million for payments into the social fund. The balance—£431 million—is for family and non-contributory benefits such as child benefit and retirement pensions.

May I draw hon. Members' attention to the Department of Finance and Personnel vote 3, where a total of almost £3 million is sought for the community relations programme. The programme of community relations work undertaken by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Education continues to expand. Total expenditure by both Departments will increase from £4 million in 1990-91 to £5·5 million in this financial year. That will support programmes designed to create equality of opportunity and equity of treatment. It also includes projects to promote cross-community contact and increase mutual respect and understanding. The Government believe that those policies and practical measures will, in time, help to ease community divisions.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): In view of the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, is the Minister in a position to say what the Government's attitude is to those councils that may sustain heavy losses? Naturally, I am thinking particularly of Lisburn council, which stands to lose some £3 million. Will the Minister explain the standing—I am choosing my

[Mr. James Molyneaux]

words carefully—of what appears to have been a circular issued by the Bank of England and perhaps made available by the Department of the Environment in Great Britain, giving the impression—again, I choose that word carefully—that BCCI was a bona fide institution in which councils could safely invest?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am sure that the House appreciates the concern expressed by the right hon. Gentleman on behalf of his constituents. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, as statute requires, approved the creation of a capital fund by Lisburn borough council. The financial management of the fund, including investment decisions, are matters solely for the district council.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland does not offer guidance on the standing of financial institutions and does not maintain a list of authorised institutions. The consequences of individual investment decisions are a matter for the council involved, but I know that Department of the Environment officials would be willing to talk to officials of Lisburn council if they so wish. However, I stress, as the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) will understand, that those discussions will be without commitment.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Minister must realise that he is the first Minister with an opportunity to comment on this matter since the number of councils involved came tumbling out of the woodwork. What discussions has he had with Scottish Office and Department of the Environment Ministers about how they will adopt a joint approach to the problem? Is he really going to argue to the House that, having led local authorities up the garden path by issuing an approved list that will undoubtedly have been referred to by financial brokers acting on their behalf, those authorities will be left in the lurch by the Government who so callously deceived them?

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall pay the hon. Gentleman the compliment of believing that he knows as well as I do that I have no responsibility for most of the matters to which he has referred. In the context of a debate about appropriations in Northern Ireland and in response to a serious and concerned question from the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley, I have expressed the position in relation to Lisburn council. I repeat that, if the officials from Lisburn council wish to talk to Department of the Environment officials in Northern Ireland, I am sure that those officials would be happy to do so—but without commitment.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I understand the Minister's present reticence, but will he give an assurance from the Northern Ireland Office that it will not only look at the issue but will be helpful to the council, because that authority will be in very serious difficulties through no fault of its own? If, as has been alleged, the difficulty has arisen through propaganda put out and approved by authorities on this side of the water, surely the Minister cannot, Pontius Pilate like, wash his hands and say that it is a matter for the people in London and has nothing to do with his office. I am not suggesting that he would do that, but I use that illustration.

Dr. Mawhinney: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for not suggesting that I would do that.

The financial management of any council funds, including investment decisions and their consequences, are matters for the council involved. I think that the hon. Gentleman will understand that. Through the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley, I have made an offer to the officials at Lisburn.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Dr. Mawhinney: I should now like to wind up. I have nearly finished.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There was some controversy earlier about whether the Department of the Environment sent out quarterly returns accompanied by a list of institutions that were authorised on 28 February 1991—a copy of which I have in my hand. The Minister seems to be saying that no such list was sent to local authorities in Northern Ireland, which is contrary to what has happened in England, Scotland and Wales. Is it in order for the Minister to deny that when put in terms of a point of order?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): That is barely a point of order for the Chair, but very much a matter for debate. I regret that the hon. Gentleman, who is an experienced parliamentarian, chose a point of order to express an opinion.

Dr. Mawhinney: In my opening remarks, I sought to draw the attention of the House to the main provisions of the order. In replying to the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North will respond to detailed points raised by hon. Members. I commend the order to the House.

5.5 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): First, I thank the Minister for taking us so diligently through the estimates. He will recall that we had a conversation before the debate. I formed the impression then that he was going to make a shorter speech than usual. I presume that his speech was drawn out because of the interventions that arose from his comments.

I shall try to render in order the point of order put by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) by asking the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), a specific question. It seems that there is no doubt that the Department of the Environment in England and Wales—and, I presume, the Scottish Office in Scotland—have been issuing advice to local authorities in Great Britain about institutions to which they should turn to borrow money. That advice involved the list to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South referred.

The Minister of State, however, referred not to the Department of the Environment in London, but to the Department of the Environment in Belfast. I understood him to say clearly that no such advice had been given by officials at the Department of the Environment in Belfast. That is a neat way of ducking the question, but we need to find out the answer, which is what my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South was seeking to do. Was the information issued by the Department of the Environment in London and, if not circulated in the Province, at least

made known to district councils in the Province? It is no good the Under-Secretary shrugging his shoulders as though that would absolve Ministers in the Province of any responsibility for it.

If the information went to the Province in that way, district councils in the Province, like district councils throughout the United Kingdom, were misled into believing that a specific institution against which the Bank of England took action some days ago was a bona fide financial institution which, to coin a phrase, was nearly as safe as the Bank of England. They were led to believe that they could risk their ratepayers' money and future resources by borrowing from that institution. We need an explanation of that.

I wish to devote the bulk of my comments to the state of the economy in the Province. I have previously said that I find the Government's attitude towards economic progress in the Province complacent, and I believe that the Minister of State repeated that complacency today.

I shall raise two issues with the Minister, and I hope that he will be able to give definitive explanations when he winds up the debate. The first, which will come as no surprise to the Under-Secretary of State, relates to Northern Ireland Electricity—an issue that we debated in the Select Committee on Northern Ireland some weeks ago on one of the few occasions in this Parliament when the Government were defeated on an item of policy. That defeat reflected the views of all sections of the community, not just elected representatives but trade unions and ordinary men and women, and clearly illustrated the widespread opposition in the Province to the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity, particularly in the form presented to the House.

I urge the Minister either to shelve his proposals completely and retain Northern Ireland Electricity in public ownership or, if he is not prepared to do that—he has said on a number of occasions that he is not—at least to withdraw the present proposals and return with fresh ones that are more acceptable to the elected Members and the peoples of Northern Ireland. I believe that there is still an opportunity for the Government to do that, and I urge that course of action on them.

The House will know that the management of the Royal Victoria hospital has expressed a keen interest in opting out of the health service, despite widespread opposition on the part of elected representatives in the Province and of the staff and consultants. Will the Minister use his influence in Government circles to deny that hospital opted-out status? As the staff want a ballot before any final decision, I also urge the Minister to exercise any influence that he has with the hospital management to encourage them to hold a ballot so that the staff and consultants and others at the hospital can make their views known in the privacy of the ballot box.

Dr. Godman: Returning to the Minister's comments on the child support agency, what information has my hon. Friend received about the 500 new jobs involved? Are they all new jobs? If so, will he impress on Northern Ireland Ministers the fact that a goodly proportion of these new jobs should be given to handicapped people? I served on the Standing Committee of the relevant Bill, where I sought similar assurances about the Scottish child care agency and the one to be set up south of the border.

Mr. Marshall: It will come as no great surprise to my hon. Friend to know that I do not have the answers to his questions, but I am sure that they will have been heard by the Under-Secretary of State who I hope will answer them later.

The debate takes place against a background of continually increased unemployment in the Province. In previous debates of this kind, Ministers have taken some comfort from the fact that the Province has been cushioned from the economic disadvantages that the rest of the United Kingdom has experienced. That phenomenon is now ending, and the recession will continue apace both in Great Britain and in the Province, where redundancies and unemployment will continue to rise. I have given credit to Ministers before for their attempts to cushion the economy of the Province from the ravages of the past 12 years of Tory Government, but the best that can be said of them is that they have been less successful in devastating the economy of the Province than their counterparts have been in the rest of the United Kingdom—although admittedly they started from a higher level of unemployment.

I think that we can agree that the prospects for job creation continue gloomy. The Industrial Development Board has had a disappointing year in respect of job creation. I am worried that efforts towards job creation appear to be devoted to attracting back—office, civil service-type jobs. There does not appear to be enough urgency about or recognition of the need for increasing the manufacturing base in the Province. It goes without saying that the essential requirement for the economic wellbeing of the Province is the need to attract investment in enterprises which will bring with them research and development facilities.

The precarious nature of the manufacturing base is illustrated by the fact that if the present rate of redundancies continues throughout this year the number of people unemployed will exceed the number of employed in manufacturing in the Province.

If that were not bad enough, the single European market of 1992 is looming and it is no exaggeration to say that it may lead to a catastrophic collapse in the Province's economy. The Minister will have seen the recently published "Cambridge Regional Economic Review" which states that Northern Ireland faces one of the largest losses of employment in the United Kingdom after 1992. Other scenarios can be projected, but if for the sake of argument we accept this assessment and it proves correct, employment in the manufacturing sector is projected to fall by 22·5 per cent.—more than one fifth of the jobs in the sector—as a consequence of the advent of the single market.

Even on the most optimistic assessment that I have seen, the advent of the single market will lead to job losses of about 11,000, or 10·5 per cent. That would reduce employment in the manufacturing sector from 103,000 to 92,000.

It is no good Ministers relying on their piecemeal approach to economic development. Now is the time to develop a comprehensive strategy for attracting investment and improving the manufacturing base in the Province. I repeat a charge that I have levelled at Ministers before—by their failure in this respect, they have done a great deal to undermine the economy of the Province and have jeopardised the prospects for its future economic success.

[Mr. Marshall]

The root causes of the Government's failure to halt the decline in the manufacturing sector in Britain and in the Province has been the absence—they take pride in this and I do not accuse them of hiding it—of a long-term and coherent policy for industry. There has been no sense of direction, no core strategy and no clearly defined purpose in the Government's approach to industrial and manufacturing affairs. The economic difficulties of Northern Ireland will continue under this Government, but after the next general election the Labour Government will attach the highest priority to the regeneration of the economy of the Province.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman also agree that it is most important that the Northern Ireland Office should look closely at companies entering the Province and buying up existing companies? Too often, having been bought up, the companies disappear. A company currently under threat is the Loomis Mackie factory in Belfast, which for generations was first in the field of the manufacturing of textile equipment. Now it is under severe threat, many of its employees have been paid off and others have been given notice. We cannot afford acquisitions which lead to the decimation of our industry.

Mr. Marshall: Only a foolish politician would say that he did not agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says. We wish to attract investment that will increase job opportunities, not reduce them. That will be part of a Labour Government's strategy and we will try to ensure that investment is not just an asset-stripping exercise where people move in quickly, achieve a quick fix and get out. We all have an interest in improving the industrial base and the only way to do that is to attract long-term investment that will provide secure jobs.

Contrary to the way in which the Government have behaved in the past 12 years, the next Labour Government will seek to modernise the Province's manufacturing base, not destroy it. Our strategy for economic development will be drawn up in partnership with all sides of industry. Among other things it will include proper levels of investment in high-quality training and retraining for the young, the unemployed and those who are in work but need retraining. It will also ensure that resources are efficiently targeted, but not just in terms of some spurious concept of competitiveness as defined by Tory politicians and civil servants in the Province. Such targeting will ensure that real employment opportunities are created in all parts of the Province.

We will ensure that the Province receives its proper share of European structural funds and that they are genuinely additional to public expenditure. I have grave doubts, shared by politicians from the Province, as to whether additionality is practised in terms of those funds. Ministers deny that, but I and my party take the view that moneys from the structural fund should increase total expenditure and not just relieve the burden of Treasury expenditure.

Our strategy will be based on a partnership which recognises the crucial role that employers and businesses have to play. It will not undervalue Northern Ireland's greatest asset, which is its people. They and their representatives in the trade unions will be involved in drawing up our economic strategy, and that strategy will refuse to accept the counsel of despair that nothing else can be done. Our strategy will have at its heart the recognition that we cannot break down the sectarian barriers in the Province until people from both communities have equal status and equal economic life chances. Until such a strategy is introduced to the Province, its economy will continue to decline and the prosperity that its people want will be denied. We shall ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have the opportunity of such a strategy.

5.23 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The debate on the order gives hon. Members a chance to discuss matters affecting Northern Ireland constituencies. Before speaking about my own constituency I shall comment on the Minister's speech. The first issue, raised initially by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), relates to the MacSharry proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy, a matter that is causing great consternation in the 12 countries of the Community.

Most Governments are responding, in most cases adversely, to the recommendations. South of the border —I mean the border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, not that between Scotland and England as was mentioned earlier—the Dublin Government have responded. However, so far in Northern Ireland there has generally been silence from those who govern us from Stormont.

People in the farming community are alarmed. As everyone knows, agriculture is the main industry in the Province and the MacSharry proposals could decimate the numbers employed in the industry and in its allied processing plants. The industry provides thousands of jobs for all sections of the community in all parts of Northern Ireland. It is not good enough for the Minister to say that he will bring the matter to the attention of the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). This is a major opportunity for the Government to make a firm statement on their reactions to the MacSharry proposals and on how they see those proposals affecting Northern Ireland agriculture.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should state that they will fight these proposals and not just wait until they pass into law, at which time the Government will find some way to excuse themselves to farmers?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman and I are in full agreement on that. We want a strong Government response that will give guidance and leadership to the people of Northern Ireland, and especially to those engaged in agriculture. It is not good enough to sit silent while waiting to see what happens in Brussels, because by then events will have overtaken us.

The Minister spoke about the Northern Ireland economy. He was right to say that, to some extent, Northern Ireland has escaped the major impact of the recession, a recession which Government policies have brought to other parts of the United Kingdom. Some Conservative Members are smiling. Prospects are not bright—a fact stressed by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall). No advance factories are to be built in Northern Ireland next year, and many such factories are lying idle waiting for

clients. That is bad news because it means that the Government and the Industrial Development Board do not anticipate any inward investment in Northern Ireland next year. If they did anticipate such investment, they would have a programme to build more advance factories.

I may be jumping to the wrong conclusion, but if I am not we shall have to look at the whole strategy of the IDB. For example, is it wise to continue to concentrate on offices and staff in Europe and America and in other foreign parts to try to attract inward investment when it is anticipated that there will be none?

At times, it is wise to have offices to promote Northern Ireland as a suitable base within the European Community for foreign firms, but if it is anticipated that in the foreseeable future such investment is unlikely, are they not a waste of public funds? Such expenditure runs into millions of pounds, which could more usefully be used to assist the business men who live in Northern Ireland, who have their roots there, and who are more likely to stay there, even in tough times.

The minute that times get tough those who come in from outside quickly disappear. We have seen that in parts of County Antrim, such as south Antrim, east Antrim and north Antrim, as the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) knows. It happened with Goodyear, in Craigavon in Upper Bann. Major firms have been attracted, and they were welcome, but once things got rough, they quickly left Northern Ireland.

The Government may need to rethink their strategy for providing employment in Northern Ireland, and concentrate more on assisting smaller businesses in the Province. It must be remembered that small businesses provide a large percentage of total employment in the United States of America—not large firms employing thousands of people, but small firms employing 25 people or fewer. I should like to see that considered in relation to Northern Ireland.

I take the opportunity to praise one other aspect of the work of the Industrial Development Board—its promotion throughout the world of Northern Ireland produce. It is taking groups of industrialists and business men to the continent, to south-east Asia, to Japan and elsewhere to promote goods from Northern Ireland. Most such visits have been successful. The IDB should be congratulated on that form of venture, which it has developed in recent years.

Before I talk about my constituency, I should like to mention one more general aspect—the urban development programme throughout the Province. The Department of the Environment and the Minister responsible deserve our congratulations on the great turnround in many of our rural towns and villages. For 20 years of violence, many border towns and villages went into decline—towns such as Enniskillen, Strabane, Omagh, Dungannon, Armagh and Newry. It is good to see the regeneration now taking place in almost every one of those towns. People returning to Northern Ireland after a five-year absence are astounded to see the progress that has been made. It would be wrong not to put that on the record.

However, one aspect of the urban development programme that requires the Minister's further attention is the speed with which applications are processed by officials at the Department of the Environment. I do not wish to be misunderstood; I am not saying that the problem lies with the officials themselves—far from it. The problem lies in the fact that too few officials are employed in the Department to carry out the task. Many applicants for urban development grants find that it takes almost a year to hear whether their scheme will be approved. It takes so long that the applicant often drops the idea and never starts the scheme at all. The jobs are not created, the contractors do not get the work, and the scheme falls through.

The Department of the Environment staff who deal with applications for urban development grants are so overloaded that, even after a year, when the applicant gets the decision to proceed, often he still does not know what grant he will get. He is told that he can start without knowing what grant he will get, so he may take the risk and start. Once an applicant has started, it may take another year before the grant payable to him is released. The tremendous delay in the mechanism for handling urban development grants is damaging the possibility of further employment and improvements in our rural towns.

There are towns and villages in the east of the Province that need urban development grants just as much as those in the west. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I can think of some on the east coast of County Down, near my constituency, and, indeed, one or two in Strangford. The Minister will have heard the response of hon. Members on both sides of the House to my suggestion, so I ask him to ensure a fair allocation of funds for urban development across the whole of Northern Ireland, not just in the border areas.

Mr. William Ross: Surely my right hon. Friend should go on to explain to the Minister that one of the reasons why small towns and villages in the east of the Province are experiencing such difficulty is the great effort being made to get Belfast buzzing. Belfast may be buzzing, but it is buzzing at the expense of the smaller towns and villages.

Mr. Taylor: I do not want to get into a competition between Belfast and our rural towns and villages. I have an interest in the whole of Northern Ireland as well as in Strangford, the part of it that I represent. I rejoice in the fact that Belfast is buzzing. I am delighted to see the progress being made in the capital city of Northern Ireland. Anyone who now sees Royal avenue, and the urban development and housing programmes on the periphery of the city centre, can express nothing but satisfaction at the progress being made in our capital city.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) says, we want a fair distribution of the funds. They should not go just to the west, just to Belfast, or just to the east. My point was that too little may be going to the eastern part of the Province.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I entirely agree that we need a fair distribution of the funds, and that the present distribution is unfair. Does my right hon. Friend see part of the reason for the present unfair distribution in the malign influence of a certain international fund?

Mr. Taylor: No, I do not. The funding for the urban development programme can come from the Department of the Environment, as happens with Belfast. But the so-called malign influence of the fund to which my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) refers has no role to play in the urban development in the city of Belfast.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that, outside the city of Belfast, the urban development fund is tied in to the

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

international fund—in fact, it is the international fund? It seems strange that a part of the country that objects strongly to the international fund and everything about it still has to apply to that fund to get what Belfast can apply for solely from the urban development fund.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Member for Antrim, North is right. The International Fund for Ireland does not finance urban development projects in the city of Belfast; as I understand it, its funding is restricted to projects in villages and towns outside Londonderry and Belfast. I want to see the funding for urban development going to the eastern part of the Province as well as elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

The provision of adequate school buildings is a continuing problem for all of us in the House. I acknowledge that demographic trends in Northern Ireland can mean that some schools are too large, so there has to be some rationalisation in the number of schools. That applies both to the state sector and the Roman Catholic-maintained sector. The number of pupils in Roman Catholic schools—the maintained sector—is falling, too. But in Strangford the situation is very different. Although the number of children in Roman Catholic-maintained schools in my constituency is falling every year—last year it fell below 1,000 for the first time in the history of the region—the reverse is true in the state-controlled schools. Their pupil numbers steadily increase year by year.

We have major schemes that require the serious attention of the Minister responsible for education. I mention especially the necessary extension of Comber high school, which has about 700 pupils and 17 temporary classsrooms parked all over its play areas. That scheme has been on the board for nearly 10 years and still no decision has been made to provide permanent classrooms for the children of Comber, an area which is continuing to grow every year, as it is on the periphery of Belfast.

The second school that I would mention is Regent House grammar school in Newtownards, which is now one of the largest grammar schools in Northern Ireland, with more than 1,500 pupils. It would take more, if the accommodation were available, but at that school, too, pupils have to be taught in temporary classrooms, as the population of Newtownards grows year by year. The population in my constituency has grown by 10,000 electors in the past eight years, and there has been a similar increase in the number of pupils attending both primary and secondary school.

I therefore ask the Department, in co-ordination with the Southern education and library board, to give priority to those projects, and I hope that, before the end of the debate, the Minister will confirm that they are receiving the attention which I say they deserve. Having made that point, let me place on record my appreciation of the fact that both the board and the Department have finally proceeded with the scheme at Movilla secondary school. That scheme is now complete and is providing a useful facility in that part of Newtownards.

My final point regarding general social provision is in connection with hospitals. My main concern is for the Ards hospital in Newtownards, although I have reason to continue to feel worried also about the Foster Greene and Belvoir hospitals and about the various other hospital services throughout the constituency of Strangford.

There was some publicity in the local Newtownards press about suggested or reported cuts at the Ards hospital. I regret to say that the reports were somewhat exaggerated by the sources from which they came. Subsequently, many councillors from the relevant councils —Ards, Castlereagh and North Down borough council —and I had a meeting with the chairman, officers and officials of the area health board. Although it became clear that the figures quoted had been exaggerated, it also became clear that the board had to give increased salaries to its staff this year and that the funding for those increased salaries had to be found from savings in the services being provided by the hospitals.

It became clear that the board was not receiving additional funding from the Government to pay the increased salaries, but had to make cuts in health services in our area to pay for them. That means, in effect, that there will be cuts somewhere along the line—in community care, care for the elderly or at hospitals. We shall be hurt somewhere and, that is bad news for the whole of the North Down and Ards area.

I am anxious for confirmation that Ards hospital will continue as it is and that there is no proposal or intention to take away any of the existing services from that hospital, especially since, as I have already said, it serves one of the fastest-growing areas in Northern Ireland. It is the last place where we should be reducing hospital services—on the contrary, we should be thinking in terms of increasing hospital services in the Ards area.

I said earlier that we wanted urban development programmes in the eastern part of the province as well as in the west. We want fair play for all sections of the community. The same applies to hospitals. Some 40 per cent. of the people in our health board area live in North Down/Ards yet only 10 per cent. of the board's expenditure goes to that area; 90 per cent. goes elsewhere. The time has come for people who live in North Down and Ards—in the constituencies of North Down and Strangford—who contribute 40 per cent., through taxes and rates, to the funding of the health and hospital services, to get 40 per cent., at least, of the services provided. The money should not be going elsewhere, and I shall pursue that point in greater detail as we assemble more information and facts to support the case. I suggest that the people of North Down and Ards are now being denied their fair share of health services in Northern Ireland.

I wish to refer to a number of road schemes in my constituency. Roads are the main means of transport in Northern Ireland—especially in my constituency—and have been since the railway system was removed from most of Northern Ireland. I praise the Minister responsible for the environment for his enthusiasm for the roads system in the Province and I hope that, before long, a policy may develop that gives us even more investment in the road structure and network in Northern Ireland. The order before us provides for an increase in total expenditure in Northern Ireland of 9 per cent. That is more or less in line with the inflation rate that the Conservative Government have created during the past year. I should like to think that, even if inflation falls, as we are told that

it may, to 3 or 4 per cent. next year, there will be not a 3 or 4 per cent. increase in expenditure on roads in Northern Ireland but a major and significant increase.

One major road scheme recently completed in Newtownards is on the main Donaghadee road as one leaves the town. On behalf of the whole community, I place on record my appreciation for that scheme. It has been completed successfully and there has been a great improvement in what was a very dangerous section of road.

I should also like to pay tribute to the Minister for his role in securing the new link bridge over the River Lagan, the contract for which was announced yesterday. About £80 million in total is to go jointly to Farrans of Dunmurry —now a southern Irish firm—and John Grahams of Dromore. That scheme has interested me for many years. It has been on the drawing board for well over a decade and is essential to the revitalisation of the city of Belfast and in linking the countryside south of Belfast with that north of Belfast.

It will be tremendously important to people who live in my constituency and in the constituencies of North Down and East Belfast. It will mean the interlinking of our railway system. It is a major project, and I am glad that the Government have taken the bit between their teeth and given it the go-ahead. I wish all involved success, and hope that the scheme will be completed as quickly as possible, to the advantage of all in Northern Ireland.

Some smaller road projects in my constituency have caused me concern over the past few years. Many of them have been the subject of correspondence, but the time has come for me to place it on public record that they are causing me anxiety, and to ask the Government publicly to answer questions about what is happening.

The House will know that Portavogie is one of the two major fishing ports in Northern Ireland. The total value of our fishing industry is £25 million, and half of it comes through the port of Portavogie on the east coast of County Down on the Ards peninsula. Anyone who is familiar with modern fishing ports will know that large lorries and trailers go in and out of them every day. That port, together with Kilkeel—I see that the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) has entered the Chamber, and he will confirm this—now provides 25 per cent. of the prawn cocktails in the United Kingdom. We are very proud of that, but the prawns have to get out of Portavogie and Kilkeel. The hon. Gentleman looks a bit surprised at the statistic but it is true.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I understood that it was more.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has to say that he likes prawns—or nephrops, as the former Member of Parliament for South Down, being a Greek scholar, would have said. The road system around the harbour is atrocious. It is worn out, narrow and pot-holed. It is time that someone ensured that there was a modern road system to serve that great fishing port and to carry the big lorries and trailers that enter it day after day.

The second road that needs attention crosses the Irish peninsula from Portavogie on the east coast to Kircubbin. The road is like a switchback—it goes up and down and twists around. It is a dangerous road, and there have been many accidents. I appeal to the Minister to ensure that that road receives attention. If there is to be increased investment in the roads system in Northern Ireland, it is important to remember that sometimes the smaller roads need as much attention as the major roads.

The Ards peninsula, as well as being an agricultural and fishing area, is a major tourist area, especially in the summer. It has the largest concentration of caravan sites in Northern Ireland. People go there for their holidays in the summer, and people from Belfast go there for weekends. They all travel through Millisle. The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) knows Millisle well. On one side of the main street is a new Baptist church and a significant Presbyterian Housing Association scheme for the elderly. On the other side, and only on that side, are the shops. Elderly people have to walk across the main street, which carries all the traffic for the caravan sites. It is dangerous.

A pedestrian crossing has been provided in the main street of Donaghadee, which carries the same traffic. I am aware that the volume of traffic did not warrant that pedestrian crossing, but the then Minister used his discretion and approved one on the ground that a high percentage of retired people lived in Donaghadee. I appreciate that, when a Minister exercises his discreton, some unkind politicians will try to get him to do it again. I am not being unkind; I am simply stating that the same conditions that applied in Donaghadee also apply in Millisle. The roads carry much the same traffic to the same caravan sites, and both areas have the same proportion of elderly people. I ask the Minister to reconsider providing a pedestrian crossing in Millisle.

Granshaw presbyterian church is a great church in County Down, not too far from La Mon restaurant, which the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) knows well—*[Interruption.]* Of course, he also knows the church well. A new church hall is being built, and that will be opened in a few months. The road is rather twisty, it has many trees and it is dark in places. A great deal of traffic comes out of the La Mon hotel, especially at weekends, and a great deal of traffic will come out of the new church hall when it is opened. We asked for just one street light at the darkest point on the bend of the road, but even that was refused. That was a harsh decision by the Minister; I do not know how he could be so hard-hearted.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Give them light.

Mr. Taylor: If we are not careful, the hon. Gentleman will give us a theology lesson. I think that we had better stick to Presbyterianism. One light would help the congregation of that church, and I ask the Minister to reconsider.

Another road that requires departmental attention is in Castlereagh. A major development called Ryan park, which provides homes for people who move from Belfast into the countryside, lies beside the main road from Castlereagh to Ballygowan. The traffic volume on that road is increasing day by day. Although it is on the main road, Ryan park is isolated because it is the only estate in the area. There is no speed limit on that part of the road.

Further along the road, at Crossnacreevy, there is a 30 mph speed limit. We want the Department to extend that speed limit to include the stretch of road that passes Ryan park. Many young children live there, and there have been some accidents because of the speed of the traffic. The speed limit needs to be extended before something bad happens.

[Mr. Taylor]

A road project of the greatest importance to one of the fastest growing towns in my constituency, and which has been on the drawing board for many years, is the Comber bypass. Last year, it was promised that the second stage would begin in 1991, but there is now a suggestion that it is slipping down the programme. The Minister met a delegation from Ards borough council and myself, and privately at that meeting he gave assurances, which it would be wrong for me to repeat today. I ask the Minister to say publicly today that progress will be made with the scheme, and that he has an anticipated date for inviting tenders. Once that is publicly confirmed, it will be welcomed by the local community. The centre of Comber is congested with traffic, especially in the early mornings and late afternoons. It is chaos and there are many delays. The sooner that section of the bypass is built the better.

Another scheme in Castlereagh that has been promised for some time relates to the junction at the Knockbreda and Saintfield roads. I must declare an interest, as I own a little bit of the land involved—*[Interruption.]* I did give it to the Government for nothing to help them get on with the scheme. They went ahead with vesting orders against other people who were involved, but who could not simply give up their land as their homes were involved.

Carryduff is increasing in size all the time, and there are large housing programmes up the Saintfield road, Cairnshill and all around that area. Every time a new development is built, more traffic is generated, and there are many delays. My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) is well aware of the problem as Carryduff is in his constituency. Every morning and every evening, people are held up at the traffic lights at the Knockbreda-Newtownbreda junction. That can be resolved only by the major road scheme moving ahead quickly without any further delay. I ask the Minister to take the opportunity today to confirm that the project will proceed.

A wider issue, which affects all of Northern Ireland, is of great concern not only to the people of Northern Ireland but to the people of Scotland, especially those in the west. I am referring to the proposal to transfer most of the freight traffic between Great Britain to Northern Ireland to Holyhead and across to Dublin, and away from the west of Scotland's route from Stranraer to Larne.

I have been pushing that subject for more than a year during Transport, Northern Ireland and Scottish questions, and each time I have had an inadequate reply. The more one analysed the replies, the more one suspected that there was a cover-up and that something was under way.

Recently, I saw that one of the bodies set up by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the British-Irish Parliamentary Association, had questioned the Minister for Public Transport from the United Kingdom Parliament at a plenary conference and that it was preparing a report on future transport between Ireland and Great Britain.

Since most people in Northern Ireland are opposed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and, therefore, the majority of Northern Ireland is not involved in any way in the discussions of the British-Irish Parliamentary Association, its report will not reflect the views of the people of Northern Ireland on what the transport system should be between Great Britain and Ireland.

However, following the latest question that I posed in the House, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland responsible for home affairs and the environment, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), kindly wrote to me further to explain in greater detail what he had suggested in his parliamentary reply. Here, for the first time, we have in writing the confirmation that there is a European Commission working group on proposals for a European high-speed rail network. He says:

"The outline plan which it contains, and which includes the Belfast-Dublin-Holyhead-Crewe route among other key links".

Thankfully—this is the important bit for Scotland as well as Northern Ireland—that recommendation

"has not been adopted by the Transport Council but is currently the subject of further in-depth study."

Then—this is where it becomes more alarming—he goes on:

"As part of that further work, British and Irish officials will shortly be having exploratory discussions about the implications of identifying the Belfast-Dublin-Holyhead-Crewe route as the key link between Great Britain and the island of Ireland."

In other words, Stranraer to Larne, which is presently the key link, is to be downgraded, and that is why we are not getting the investment in the railway system in the west of Scotland that Scottish Members have been demanding at Scottish Question Time after Scottish Question Time every month.

Now we are beginning to see the overall plan—not to invest in the railway system in the west of Scotland and at the same time to have massive capital investment, supported by the EC and the Dublin Government, on the route to Holyhead so that people in business and industry and passengers will feel inclined to use that route rather than go up to Scotland and across from Stranraer to Larne.

Dr. Godman: I have been listening intently to what the right hon. Gentleman has said about that important ferry link. The west of Scotland Members of Parliament—here I include myself—not only want to retain that link, we want to strengthen it, and some of us would like to see additional ferry services. One of my colleagues would like to see the re-establishment of the Ardrossan ferry. I would rather that ferry came into Greenock, but if it cannot, I would support it going to Ardrossan. We are with the hon. Gentleman to a man and a woman on that link.

Mr. Taylor: We in Northern Ireland very much appreciate that support from our Scottish colleagues. The matter is as serious for them as it is for us. These are secret talks between the Dublin Government and the London Government to undermine the railway and transport system to Scotland and between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not strange, too, that the Dublin Government were able to negotiate a tremendous amount of money from Europe for the reculverting of all the roads leading in that direction? When I made that point in the House to Ministers from the Northern Ireland Office, they did not seem to want to take notice of it. If those roads are ready when the traffic comes from the channel tunnel, they will get all the traffic.

Mr. Taylor: That is logical, but one has to look at the overall plan that is taking place before our very eyes.

Whether it is the culverting of roads, as the hon. Member for Antrim, North mentioned, or the hesitation to invest more money in the railway system in the west of Scotland, overall there is a plan to supplant the link between the west of Scotland and Northern Ireland to try to direct most traffic through Dublin.

The Minister responsible for traffic, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), this week met a delegation from Belfast city council in Belfast to try to revive the ferry service from Belfast to Liverpool. One would applaud those who are trying to achieve that objective, but those decisions must often be based on commercial considerations; that may be the problem there, but it may be that EC aid could help to encourage someone to invest in that ferry.

But when the Minister was talking about ferry services from Northern Ireland, did he tell that delegation that really he is planning to make people use the system to Dublin? That, basically, is the policy of Her Majesty's Government, including the Northern Ireland Office, which should be speaking up for the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, just as the Scottish Office should be speaking up for the people of the west of Scotland.

There should be a joint campaign throughout Scotland and Northern Ireland to retain and develop that link between Larne and Stranraer, which happens to be the main route between the island of Ireland and Great Britain. As the hon. Member for Antrim, East keeps telling us, it takes 95 per cent. of all Ulster freight and passengers. Not only does it do that: it also takes 30 per cent. of all the freight from the Republic of Ireland to Great Britain.

Why are we trying to undermine what commercial interests have managed to develop over the years in the ports of Larne and Stranraer? Is there a political motive behind that underhand scheme of the Northern Ireland Office to invest money with European aid to transfer all Northern Ireland traffic from Great Britain to Northern Ireland through the port of Dublin?

Mr. William Ross: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, for many years, the Scottish Office has been pouring huge amounts of money into improving the road link from Dumfries down. That money will be completely lost if the Government now turn around and start developing other road links to benefit others.

Mr. Taylor: With friends like that—I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. He concluded properly by saying that the Government will be wasting money if the plan gets under way. They will pour hundreds of millions of pounds into the railway system to Holyhead but not into the railway system in the west of Scotland, and now we know why.

Mr. Beggs: It is most important that, when the Minister replies this evening, he spells out categorically that the Northern Ireland Office, backed by the Secretary of State, is committed to retaining the Larne-Stranraer corridor as our main link within the British Isles to the Euro-route. If the Minister fails to do that, it will destroy the confidence that is now building up on the Scottish side to invest millions to match the excellent facilities that have been developed in Larne with EC grant aid. We demand an open statement tonight. We must get rid of the nonsense of directing people, passengers or hauliers to Dublin.

Mr. Taylor: You will have sensed, Madam Deputy Speaker, the strong feelings of my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East about this matter—and rightly, because Larne is in his constituency. This overall plan, to divert Northern Ireland traffic through Holyhead and Dublin, would have major implications for employment in Larne, something that the hon. Gentleman so carefully guards and upholds in this place I support the way in which he expressed himself, albeit so strongly, on this occasion.

My final appeal is to the business men of Northern Ireland, not just to the Minister. The business men of Northern Ireland are quick at times to tell politicians what they should be doing in Northern Ireland. It is not just the Church leaders: now, it is these so-called spokesmen for business and industry. If, however, we look at who they are, we do not find that many of them take a penny out of their own pockets to invest in Northern Ireland.

Yes, they are involved in business—many of them as executives—but a few years after some of them come to Northern Ireland, they go elsewhere. The real business men of Northern Ireland are the ones who have taken money out of their own pockets to invest in the future of Northern Ireland. They have provided jobs for both communities in Northern Ireland. Catholic and Protestant business men, with their roots in Northern Ireland, are the real business men, not these people who claim to speak on behalf of business and industry and belong to organisations in Belfast.

The Northern Ireland Office should take a close look at some of these organisations when they make statements and find out whether or not they truly reflect the views of business men in Northern Ireland. I am a business man as well as a politician. The business men with whom I mix certainly do not feel in tune with some of the statements made by these organisations. However, for a change, a politician is now going to tell business men what they should be doing.

The main business interests in Northern Ireland, especially in the city of Belfast, should be most concerned about the plan to divert our freight and passengers through Dublin and away from Stranraer. That is of major significance—not today or tomorrow but over the next two decades, into the 21st century. It will destroy the eastern part of Antrim; it will do great damage to our capital city of Belfast; it will be very upsetting to the future of Northern Ireland.

Therefore, I appeal to trade and industry in Northern Ireland, now that the scheme has been made public, to come to grips with the issue. The Chamber of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Confederation of British Industry should be involved in this transport issue instead of meddling in politics. It is the job of business men, trade and industry to ensure that there is a first-class transport infrastructure. It already exists between Stranraer and Larne. It should be maintained, not sacrificed to the advantage of Dublin—as the British and Irish Governments are now discussing.

6.12 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): First may I deal with the shadow that has been cast over my constituency, due to the railway accident recently? I referred to it when the Minister of State opened the debate. I am totally and absolutely opposed to the abolition of proper security and

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

protection at level crossings on that line. There was a serious accident in March of last year on this railway track and three people were killed. I thought that last year's lesson at Slaght would have been learnt by both the Minister and Northern Ireland Railways. I thought that everything would have been done to ensure that such an accident could never happen again.

I do not agree with the policy of Northern Ireland Railways. Some of these crossings should still be manned. That would provide employment for people. A large number of people were employed for many years at railway crossings, but there have always been unattended crossings on the line. About 200 yards from the place where the accident happened, there is a very large business enterprise. Large lorries cross the railway track continuously. I tremble to think of the sort of accident that could take place if a huge lorry were in collision there with an oncoming train.

The tragedy last year is put into perspective when we remember that at 7.15 on the previous evening the lights failed on that crossing. They started to give the warning signal. Then they went off completely. Fortunately, because of the amount of activity in the area, a queue of cars had built up, at the head of which was a motor cyclist. He saw the oncoming train, so he did not move on to the level crossing and the cars stayed where they were. The train was travelling slowly. The guard left the train and conducted it across the level crossing. However, that was a security failure.

As the Member of Parliament for the area, I want to know what steps Northern Ireland Railways took when that incident was reported. Or was it reported? I have heard Northern Ireland Railways say unofficially, through people who visited friends and relatives of the man who was killed, that the lights were in order. How do we know that they were in order? Is there an independent witness, or is this just Northern Ireland Railways saying that the lights were in order? Would it have said that the night before?

I do not know why the Minister did not hasten legislation on this issue. I appeal to him now to hasten the legislation and to make it, by law, compulsory that there should be a proper barrier across level crossings. There was an operator arm at that barrier, but it was taken away and lights were substituted. Although we all—councillors in the area and I—said that that was wrong, Northern Ireland Railways went ahead and substituted lights. We see the result. The lesson of Slaght should have been learnt. It was not. The lesson of Broughdone must also be learnt. We do not want that tragedy to be repeated.

I ask the Minister to have a look further up the line at the place where that business enterprise is situated and decide what type of security system should be put in place so that both the employees there and those who are travelling by rail can be safe. I trust that the Minister will arm himself speedily with the law so that he can say to Northern Ireland Railways, "This is what you have to do. Get on with it and see that it is carried out." Then, as best we can, we shall ensure safety on that railway line.

May I again express my sympathy to the family? I thank the Minister for his response. It will be conveyed by me to the family.

I have some general questions about board members. Many Departments have boards and quangos about which I should like some statistics. Under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Dublin Government have the power to nominate people to those boards and those people are then appointed by the Secretary of State if he so chose. Since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed how many nominations to how many boards came from Dublin? How many of those nominations were accepted and on what boards? I hope that the Minister will be forthcoming in answering my questions.

I do not want to hear again what I was told the other day, "For security reasons, we can't tell you," I am not asking for the names of the people involved—I have ways and means of finding out their names. I am trying to get the overall picture, because a prominent member of one of the largest boards told me in Belfast yesterday that the boards are now being overloaded by nominees from the south of Ireland. He also said that five people who had recently been nominated to his board by various groups had been turned down. I know that a tremendous sprinkling—about 20 members—have been taken off a certain board. Four people are still being sought; 16 have been found, although God alone knows where the Secretary of State found them. But what about the 20 who served their day and their generation? Perhaps they did not serve them so well because they were not yes men to the Minister. I trust that the Minister will be able to smile when he informs me of the numbers of people who have come the Dublin road.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the situation is even worse than that? Not only have certain people been removed from that board, apparently because of representations from Dublin, but another member of the board was so upset about what happened that he instantly resigned.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have heard so much about the boards that I am alarmed, which is why I am raising the issue. The time has come to do so. Defeated candidates from the Alliance party seem to get preference on the boards. Patrons of the new Tory party in Northern Ireland also get preference, whereas the Official Unionists and the Democratic Unionists are very scarce on those boards and do not appear on some at all. Recently, two were dropped from a board—they were the only two, but they were swept away.

The House must call the Minister to account so that we might get some facts. What are the qualifications of a defeated Alliance candidate or of a Tory who is afraid to put his head over the parapet in case he is shot down? What are their qualifications to be the chairmen or principals of these boards? Perhaps the Minister can help us on that issue.

Mr. Beggs: They did not say no.

Rev. Ian Paisley: That is right, they did not say no. The other day I walked into the city hall and looked at the gallery which some people call the rogues' gallery. It contains pictures of all the city's mayors. When one becomes mayor of the city, one has one's likeness painted; it is put up, but the next year it is moved down and then down again. The really good men are down in the basement. However, when one looks at the likenesses one sees So-and-so OBE, So-and-so CBE and So-and-so OBE. A Democratic Unionist does not receive an honour because his religion and politics are discriminated against.

Some Official Unionists have not been honoured because they took part in the campaign against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. McGrady: For the House's information, will the hon. Gentleman state how many members of the minority community or from parties such as the SDLP have been mayor of Belfast?

Rev. Ian Paisley: Since the SDLP controlled—I believe—eight councils, how many times has it appointed as mayor or chairman a Unionist or even an Independent Unionist?

Mr. McGrady *rose*——

Rev. Ian Paisley: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman would not be interested in members of his party receiving OBEs and CBEs. One member did receive an MBE but she was chucked out for accepting it. She had been made chairman of Magherafelt council by the Unionists. Her MBE did her a good turn and did the SDLP a bad turn.

We are talking about boards, not the mayors of councils. However, I also want to mention the Causeway hospital.

Mr. William Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on the question of nominees? I listened with interest to his question about how many people have been nominated from Dublin. Would he also like to ask how many people in Northern Ireland Dublin objected to, had cast out or had not nominated?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I should like to ask that question, but I should not receive an answer. In fact, according to a literal reading of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Dublin has no right to object. As I understand it, Dublin has a right to nominate people but not to object. I have no doubt that it does object and that its objections are listened to and acted upon, but that is not part of the agreement as far as I am aware.

I am glad that the Minister is here because it is he who is holding up the Causeway hospital. Yesterday, I had a call from some general practitioners who said that they had had a meeting with the Minister responsible for hospitals but that the decision would be made by those in finance and personnel. I understand that the spokesman for finance and personnel is therefore replying to the debate, so we have the right man in the right place, and he had better say the right thing. I suppose that he can speak on behalf of the parties involved.

The sum of £150,000 was spent on inquiries, committees and consultations on whether the hospital should be built. There was then an expectation of approval in principle—we have been waiting 14 years for the hospital. It was approved in principle, but we then had to wait for the board. We very nearly missed it because the old board was about to die and a new board was about to be born. We were scared that the new board would do what the Minister wanted and that we should not have it. However, the new board lived to pass the resolution that we should go forward.

We are then told that the money is the difficulty. No new acute hospital has been completed in the northern area in living memory. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) thinks that things are bad in his area but we have not had a new hospital in living memory. Let us consider the other areas. The western area has Altnaglevin and Erne. The southern area has Craigavon, South Tyrone and Daisy Hill. The eastern area has a veritable bonanza: the Ulster hospital, the eye and ear hospital, the Royal Victoria hospital—the accident and emergency service, an out-patients block and block A—the Royal maternity building, the Belfast City hospital tower block, which is not fully occupied, and the Mater Infirmorum hospital. Allowing for 10 to 15 per cent. central movement of hospitalised patients for regional specialist treatment, we are grossly underfunded. In 1988, our funding was estimated to be £5·58 million below the average for the rest of Northern Ireland. Over 20 years, at today's value for money, the accumulated figure comes to £100 million, so £100 million has been taken from us.

Between 1973-76 and 1988, of the total regional commitment to major capital expenditure on hospital services, the northern board's share was 6·1 per cent. That is absymal by any standards. Now that we have the Minister's approval for the hospital, we are held up by personnel and finance, and we have to wait. I make an appeal in the House and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) will do the same if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that he will support me on the matter. We are making the appeal to the Government tonight that we need the hospital. We deserve the hospital. The people need it, and there cannot be proper health care in the area without it. Please will the Government get on with it? Do the Government want us to wait another 14 years? How many more plans do the Government want?

All the general practitioners are united on the issue. All the surgeons are united, including even Dr. Robb, who was a Senator in the Dublin Parliament. All the politicians are united—the Social Democrat and Labour party, the Democratic Unionist party, the Ulster Unionist party and the Progressive Unionist party. The Government say, "If only you would all get together, we will do anything for you." Yet they will not give us a hospital, but instead steal from us £100 million. The time has come for the Government to get on their running shoes and do something.

I have been a Member of the House for 21 years. There are three councils in my constituency: Moyle, Ballymoney and Ballymena. There used to be more, because my constituency took in most of the constituency of Antrim, East in the old days. I have now come to the conclusion that the planning authorities have declared war on the three council areas. A new planning officer was appointed recently and he seems to take it that his business is to keep everyone from building, to stop all farmers from building and to push employment out of the rural areas. The three councils are now in confrontation with the planning authorities. There are no meetings at which anything is passed. Then I, as Member of Parliament—and I am quite happy about this—am asked to go to every site meeting. From the first week in September, I shall go to every site meeting in the build-up of blocked planning in the area.

Let me explain why the plans have been blocked. A business man decided to build a house in Ballycastle. He wanted to replace two houses with one good house. The objection is that the house is too good. I stood with the planning officer and he said, "Those windows are too elaborate. You cannot have a verandah in this area. Those doors are too wide. That wall is too elaborate." I said, "When were you given orders to start planning about an

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

elaborate wall?" The head planning official, whom I had never seen before, was brought in. I said, "That is senseless. The planning officials say that this man is building too good a house. You should be glad that he is investing money in the area."

The plan has now been turned down. The council has fought the planning people, and the decision is now going to the three wise men. That is unacceptable. What do the planners want the people of Northern Ireland to live in? If people want to build themselves the best possible house within building regulations, no planning officer has a right to say that they cannot build such a house. As for the farmers. It is almost an impossibility to get a retirement bungalow for them now. What are the Government up to? As for getting employment in rural areas——

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): Is the hon. Gentleman speaking about the same planning office which seems unable to prevent the Sunday market taking place although it does not have permission? It seems unable to prevent the market breaking out on to the main road and carrying on without any regard to the planning office. Is that the same planning office?

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes. What really riles me is the case of a constituent who has a motor car business. He has done everything that the planning officer asked him to do. He has fulfilled every requirement, and dotted every "i" and stroked every "t" in his business. A group of gipsies started a motor car auction down the road without permission. The prices were lower and they gave better bargains financially. They almost wrecked that man's business. I got in touch with the Minister and with the planning officer. I said, "Do something." He said, "We cannot do anything because they have just sent in a planning application." I said, "Right, is it in order?" He said, "No, it is only a planning application for half of what they are doing." I said, "Move on the other half. Here is a man who has given his life to building up a business and he will go out of business." He is going out of business.

At the weekend, the gipsies put a big notice outside the man's business stating that his business was closed and that all business was to be referred to them at the given telephone number. When I went to the police, they told me that they were not sure who had put up the notice. An honourable business man who gave employment in the area is almost out of business.

I had a meeting with that planning officer. He said to the man, "You can't have your house, because there is no way that you can build a wall and swing a gate without affecting a tree. If that tree is affected, I cannot allow you to cut that tree down." I asked him where in the book it said that one needed a wall and a gate. He said, "I don't think that it is in the book." I said, "This man will not have a wall, he will not have a gate, he will just have his house." He said, "We couldn't do that, but we will come to an agreement." I asked, "Why couldn't he swing the gate off the tree and keep the tree?" Eventually, after a hassle, I had the mayor of the town and six councillors standing on a windy road, arguing with the planning officer about one single tree.

I have faced that individual—I do not want to name him in the House—at the council. We have sat for three hours in a council meeting, with all the councillors attacking him for his attitude, his arrogance and his determination. I took a big business man, who employs about 30 people, to him, and he told him, "I will put you on the road. I will put you out of business."

Mr. Beggs: It is time he was on the road.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is time he was on the road. He has been on the road twice, and then they dumped him in north Antrim. I ask the Minister to dump him somewhere else. Why send him to pollute us in north Antrim? He can send him down to east Antrim. The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) is near the sea, and he can deal with him.

This matter has become appalling. I was up at Moyle, and the Moyle district was the same. I was down at Ballymoney, and the district was the same. We cannot conduct public planning by confrontation. Public planning should be as amicable as possible, by compromise, to see whether there is a way that planning laws can be kept in their spirit and, as far as they can be kept, to their letter. It could be a matter of only a few inches to get a proper entrance access to a road.

A man has a good, flourishing business on a byroad outside a place called Broughshane. One's education is not complete without a visit to Broughshane. It is a lovely part of the countryside, and it has a little business that is doing very well. However, that man had bother because the business premises were not large enough. He went up the road to a disused quarry that sits a distance from the road. He discovered that the quarry had a great shed built on it in the trees. He said, "I could do my business there; planning permission has already been granted and the entrance has already been approved." When the planning officer saw it, he said, "That building must be pulled down. You can't have it." Again I had the mayor and all the councillors out and we had it out with him. He wants that building to be pulled down. We need employment in Northern Ireland. The business men to whom I listen are creating jobs and doing their work.

Let me say something about roads men. *[Laughter.]* I shall say something good. One roads man said, "Where he is operating from, although he has permission, is a danger. If you brought him up here, it would be safe." However, the planning officer said, "No. Pull it down." We need to do something about planning.

I am glad that the Minister has taken action in respect of electricity for Rathlin island. I am the only Member for Northern Ireland with a large inhabited island in his constituency. The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) has an island in his constituency. There are only a few people on his island, but there are more than 90 people on Rathlin island. At the turn of the century, there were more than 1,000 people. I am glad that we are bringing light to the island. Although they are not Presbyterians—they are of another tradition from mine—they are getting the light. I would give them as many lights as I could to lighten their darkness.

I am glad that the Minister has acted on the Rathlin project. He will be remembered for doing so. I hope that grants will be available to enable those people to install electricity at a reasonable price. The Minister is nodding. He knows my attitude to this matter. I hope that the matter will soon be settled. Although I am of a different religious persuasion, I am the only constituency Member who has visited the island.

I remember when our friend Peter Mills, from Cornwall, and I were stuck on the island. We were flown in, but the fog came down and we had to be taken off in a little open boat. He was well baptised by local immersion before he got to the other side of the pond. We dried out at the local police station. Sergeant Duff's wife gave us wonderful coffee that night and sent us on our way rejoicing like the Ethiopian eunuch, about whom those men would not know anything because they do not read the Acts of the Apostles.

We need something more in Rathlin. We need something done to the harbour at Ballycastle. There is no use in having a good harbour at Rathlin and not a good harbour on the mainland. The Minister knows my mind on this matter, and I trust that we shall see real progress in the coming days.

I have spoken for far too long, but I should like to finish on an agricultural note. I am very perplexed at what the Minister said about agriculture. He should be fighting for jobs in Northern Ireland. It is proposed that there will be reductions in intervention prices. Milk prices are to fall by 10 per cent., beef by 15 per cent., butter by 15 per cent., cereals by 35 per cent., and sheepmeat, pigmeat, poultry and beef intervention meats are also expected to fall by about 15 per cent. On supply control measures, there will be reduced upper limits on sheep premiums and on calves and disposal premiums for beef. That will be the end—the exit—for many farmers in Northern Ireland. Farming is the main industry in Northern Ireland. We cannot afford to lose it. I trust that the Northern Ireland Ministers will take up the matter with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and let him know that, if he is to have a battle royal, he needs one also for the farmers of Northern Ireland.

It is amazing that the EEC had a policy to be self-sufficient, so it brought in subsidies and interventions. It produced vast surpluses. I have sat on the European Parliament's surplus committee which examined the matter. The committee sent for the Agriculture Secretary in the United States. He came over to talk to us, and he laughed. He said, "Your surpluses are only peanuts. We have an intervention in cereals in America—an entire world harvest. Your beef mountains are little molehills. We have beef mountains like Everest." He pooh-poohed the matter, but American pressure under the general agreement on tariffs and trade is coming against us in Europe today. That is where the dictation is from. It is all right for America to dictate, but we need a battle royal to be fought in Europe for our farmers.

The farming community needs to know that the Minister will carry the flag. I do not know whether the Minister responsible for agriculture in Northern Ireland is allowed to go to Europe, but it is time that he was sent there. He should sit behind the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ensure that the right hon. Gentleman is fully cognisant of the dangers that the MacSharry proposals pose to Northern Ireland's farmers. We can ask for nothing less than direct representation at the table when one of the most important businesses in our country is at stake.

I plead with the Ministers on the Treasury Bench to talk to their supremo—that is what he is called in Northern Ireland—and to ensure that they put up a proper fight to save Northern Ireland's farming community. If farming goes down, the whole economy goes down with it, with serious spill-over effects for the ancilliary businesses, the money that they generate and the people that they employ.

In the past few weeks, Northern Ireland has been through many terrible things. There will be more deaths. The Chief Constable has given us the darkest report that I have ever known a chief of police to make. Some people wonder whether the security forces will be able to contain the violence. Every night we have a litany of bombings, attempted killings and shootings. Although Northern Ireland has a resilience, as has been seen in the past few days and months, there is something that will break Northern Ireland—and that is the destruction of its agriculture and of its trade with Europe via the port of Stranraer.

I have said in Europe, in this House and at every conference that I have attended exactly what the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) has just said. I have been watching the Dublin Government well and truly making their plans, covering them with the honey of Irish blarney, and trying to get people to think that the right way to the channel tunnel is through Dublin. I am afraid that they have persuaded many hon. Members of that. I know that some of the hon. Members who attend the Anglo-Irish parliamentary group have been fighting and standing up for Northern Ireland and I am grateful to them for that, but I wonder what the Northern Ireland Office has been thinking and doing.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need a statement tonight, because such a statement would have a steadying effect on our businesses, on the morale of our business people and on our workers who would know that we have friends on this side of the water. I welcome the intervention of our Scottish colleagues, which will be a great help to the people of Northern Ireland.

I could continue to enlarge my case but, in conclusion, let us have proper roads into Larne. Let us do that now and not tarry any more. Let us get those roads to show that we are ahead because if we can do that, we will get the business when it comes. Business people choose those who can produce the goods and we must be in a position to produce those goods.

6.53 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Here we are again, for the second time this year and the third debate on a Northern Ireland appropriation order will fall on one side or the other of the general election before the year is over. Some important matters have been raised this evening, but we have also heard one of Her Majesty's Ministers being asked to deal with a single street light—and it serves him right. If the House did what needs to be done for Northern Ireland, the Minister would not even know that a street light was needed because such matters would be dealt with far below his level. The fact that he has to deal with such matters personally is the clearest possible proof of the misgovernment that has been practised on the people of Northern Ireland since 1972. There is no reason whatever for this to go on and on, year after year. Such matters could and should be dealt with properly by other means—and the sooner the better.

I am sure that other hon. Members are, like me, utterly weary of Northern Ireland business being dealt with in this way, but it is the only way and our only chance to bring home to the Government their responsibilities for the

[Mr. William Ross]

Province and how poorly they have been fulfilling them. As I have said, this has been going on for far too long, and I hope that we can see an end to it.

In one respect, the order is interesting and unusual. It refers in part I to a grant of £1,000 and to an increase of appropriation in aid of £736,246 for the year ended 31 March 1990. We do not often find a sum appearing on the appropriation order 15 or 16 months after the end of the year to which it relates. I could have understood it if the sum related to the year that has just ended. Perhaps an explanation was given before I entered the Chamber—if so, I apologise—but I remain curious because it does not happen very often.

The sums that we are dealing with are large—the order covers about £2·75 billion. That is a lot of money, a large but not infinite sum, and it is our duty to ensure that it is spent both wisely and well. I intend to raise three matters which I raised in March, when the last appropriation debate took place. I make no apology for repeating those issues, because they have not yet been resolved.

First, however, I should like to say something about the Larne-Stranraer route. From what my right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) has said, it seems that the Government are going along with the idea that they should sacrifice not only the money that was spent on the south-west Scotland road route, but also a large part of the traffic that passes through Larne harbour, with the associated jobs and the money that has been spent on the infrastructure there. The Government also seem prepared to sacrifice something of benefit to the people of south-west Scotland—and north-west England, which has not yet been mentioned—simply to try to placate Dublin and to buy off Irish republicanism. I should have thought that even the Government would have long since learnt that that has been a nugatory effort. Once one starts paying the Danegeld, one pays it for ever—and this House has been paying it to Dublin and to Irish republicanism since 1969 for an absolutely nil return. The time is long since past when that nonsense should have stopped.

I hope that the Minister will accept one Kudo from me. He will be aware that I have been asking for replacement grants for poor quality housing since long before both he and I became Members of this House. I am pleased that that objective has eventually been accomplished, but I am annoyed that so many people have jumped on the bandwagon, from the hype on radio and television and in the newspapers, one would think that one simply has to crook one's finger to get the grant to build a new house. Those of us who have taken an interest in the matter down the years know that it is a difficult and complex scheme which will be difficult to police. It is not quite so simple or straightforward as some would have us believe. Nevertheless, the scheme is long overdue and, had it been put in place 15 years ago instead of now, much of our bad housing would not have been improved but replaced.

I am a great believer in people owning their own dwelling because, home ownership is one of the most stabilising influences. One of the great success stories of the Conservative Administration of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs Thatcher) was that she initiated the concept of selling council houses on a large scale. It has done a lot of good. Of course, we all appreciate that there is a bad side, but basically it was a sound principle and one that was welcome. I hope to see it extended so that more and more people own their own dwelling, but there will always be a place for let accommodation.

I hope that the rest of my remarks will not be taken amiss by the Government. There is a certain amount of slippage in some areas, which should be dealt with. Some have already been touched on, including the new Coleraine hospital. The proposal for a new hospital has been floating around for not 14 but 30 years, since it was first decided that Coleraine needed a new hospital. The proposal has been chopped and changed and all sorts of arguments have been heard. It is about time that a final decision was made. I have today tabled a written question asking for a statement on the subject next week. I hope that we will receive a favourable response then if not today, because it is overdue. The intellectual argument about the need for that hospital has been won. It is a matter of money. The proposal has been on the waiting list so long that the money should be made available now so that people can look forward to proper health care for the first time.

I ask the Minister to recall that on 11 March I raised the matter of the incinerator at the Du Pont site at Londonderry. Several things have happened since then and the matter has moved on, not least because I have asked several questions and much of the local population has become more worried about the incinerator.

Ministers will not have missed the widespread anxiety about toxic waste and its disposal in Northern Ireland. Even if the Minister missed the public debate about it, he will not have missed the questions that I have tabled. No doubt he will have looked at the answers to those questions and had discussions about them with his officials. I may tell him that I had some difficulty in getting my questions past the Table Office. If the Table Office had taken them as I wrote them, the Minister would have found them rather more precise than the form in which they appeared on the Order Paper.

If the Minister has taken an interest in my questions, he will be aware that there is a need for people throughout the United Kingdom to pay attention to how we get rid of chlorinated hydrocarbons. They are not a nice material. The technology that has been used to dispose of them is burning at high temperatures, but that involves dangers. I am sure that the Minister has also been made aware of the problem in the Bolsover area of England with dioxins in cows' milk. Hon. Members who represent Derbyshire will have besieged the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with demands that he trace and eliminate the source of that dioxin. Their interest in the purity of our food, at least in the case of one Derbyshire Member, is well known.

I have tabled a question about dioxins which has not yet been answered. It is a matter of national importance. It is not restricted to two or three farms in Derbyshire which are troubled with the problem. It should worry every hon. Member. It is a dangerous, long-lasting material. In my question I asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has yet managed to discover and eliminate the source of the pollution. I can assure the House that every farmer in the United Kingdom is anxious about this.

Farmers are also anxious about another matter dealt with in an answer that I received from another Government Department. It is the principle that the polluter pays. The polluter can be made to pay only if he can be identified and the pollution traced back to him. In a case in the Irish Republic, we all saw how difficult it was

to reach that stage when the farmer was facing ruin. If the poor chap had not gone on and on beyond what most people would have done, he would have been out of the door and the pollution would probably have continued. I sometimes wonder whether that, rather than a real need for an incinerator, has anything to do with the proposal to bring an incinerator to the Du Pont site.

Northern Ireland is one huge food factory. Brussels is under pressure to outlaw any incinerators sited near food processing plants. I look on Northern Ireland as a food producing and processing plant and so should every other hon. Member who eats in this House, which probably means all of us. Food production is also the largest industry in Northern Ireland. It is increasingly successful in promoting its food in the European market. Like me, the Minister with responsibility for agriculture in Northern Ireland, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) visited the food fair in the early spring of this year in London. I am sure that he was as much impressed with what he saw as I was. It was not a Northern Ireland only event. Scotland, Wales, England, Germany, Uncle Tom Cobbley and all from every corner of Europe were there. It was a most impressive exhibition. I certainly enjoyed it and learned a great deal.

At that exhibition I was told by Northern Ireland producers that they sold their produce with the image of the green, wholesome, naturally produced products which are free from chemicals. One does not need to spell out to the Minister just what effect even the slightest smell of chemical infiltration into the food chain would have on that flourishing trade.

Dioxins will be in not only milk but wool and all meat. They are an insidious chemical and one with which the body has great difficulty dealing. When I read about the problems in Derbyshire I did some checking up. I discovered that MAFF has laid down that the tolerable daily intake of dioxins is 0·01 nanograms per kilogram of body weight per day. The maximum tolerable concentration of dioxins in milk is 0·7 nanograms per kilogram of milk. On the farms in Derbyshire the highest concentration was 0·47 nanograms. That should worry every one of us. Dioxins come essentially from chemical waste which is difficult to handle and has had to be burned. If it is burned at the wrong temperature dioxins are the sort of nasties that come out of them.

As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker will appreciate, I have taken a keen interest in the incinerator. It is in that part of county Londonderry which is now represented by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) but it is not far from my boundary and I represented the area in my former incarnation as the hon. Member for Londonderry before the number of seats was increased from 12 to 17.

I read the statement made by the Du Pont company. The project manager, Mr. Richard Wylie, said that it could be August before any announcement was made. He also said that Du Pont did not operate incinerators anywhere simply for profit. It operated them whenever it had a problem with waste disposal. If there is spare capacity, they will help out locally. That flies somewhat in the face of the idea that we need only one incinerator for the whole of the island of Ireland. Du Pont is building one to deal with its own waste but which can also deal with much more than its own waste.

We are also told that co-operation between the Northern Ireland Office and the Dublin Government—so on an all-Ireland basis—to draw up a policy for hazardous waste disposal has been a small step in bringing nationalists and unionists together. I assure the Minister that it sure has. It seems that the only time the two Governments can manage to bring us all together is when they do something of which we all disapprove and which affects everyone equally. That shows that we have at least some common interests.

At Maydown there is an existing liquid waste incinerator which treats 5,500 tones per annum, most of it in the form of chlorinated hydrocarbons. However, until recently, about 700 tonnes of solid waste has been shipped for incineration to Finland or France.

Mr. Wylie emphasised:

"waste minimisation is the first priority. To run chemicals through a plant and then have to spend vast sums on disposal is obviously daft."

I accept that that would be daft because if those chemicals can be recycled they are just as good as the originals. Mr. Wylie went on to state that the Du Pont projections involve substantial reductions in waste at Maydown—by up to 70 per cent. by the end of the decade. On the source of the greatest local concern, dioxin, Mr. Wylie commented:

"If someone lived downwind and the wind direction never changed"—

I can tell the House that it blows most of the time from the south and west—

"and if they lived there continuously for 70 years; if they had light body-weight; if they never took a holiday; if the incinerator never shut down; and if it always ran at the maximum limit—then the person would still be safe by some orders of magnitude."

The Minister will have long since gathered that the questions that I have put down are so precise that only someone with a fair knowledge of the chemical process would know what to ask. The chap advising me described the latter quote from Mr. Wylie as "nonsense", but I would not expect Du Pont to say anything else—after all, it is their muck and they have to get rid of it somehow.

In the light of the quotes that I have given to the House I should like to know more about the 700 tonnes of solid waste currently shipped out of Northern Ireland. That 700 tonnes is the same quantity as the dangerous stuff that is to be burnt in the proposed new incinerator. At present, 5,500 tonnes of chlorinated hydrocarbons are burnt at the old plant on the Maydown site. Is that present incinerator up to the requirement of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988? I believe that those regulations come into force in Northern Ireland tomorrow. If that plant does not meet those requirements, what steps are being taken to ensure its compliance? If it fails to comply, that means that it is a dangerous plant.

Can the Minister tell me whether the emissions from the stack in the present plant are monitored? What is coming up that chimney and spreading over all Northern Ireland? Is the Minister absolutely certain that the COSHH regulations are being met? If not, what steps will he take to ensure that they are? Will the Minister also make sure that he does not forget that the Safety At Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 applies not only to those working in the Maydown plant, but to farmers in the fields, who may be many miles downwind. The company's responsibilities do not end with its workers, but with all those other folk outside the plant who may be adversely affected.

Has not Australia recently said no to incineration and the working incinerator, which I believe was an ICI plant,

[Mr. William Ross]

been closed down? Is it not also true that the plant that Du Pont operates in Canada—I believe that it is at Swan Hills—was until recently the only hazardous waste incinerator in Canada? It has an annual capacity of 5,000 tonnes and a queuing time for disposal of more than a year. That plant now takes hazardous waste from Alberta only, following an accident in which a lorry carrying PCBs to the incinerator turned over at the border between Ontario and Manitoba. It is clear, therefore, that the Australians and Canadians are worried about incineration. Indeed, the Canadians have restricted the incineration plant not just to the territory of Canada at large, but to one state only. If the Canadians and Australians are so worried, surely we should also be worried.

On 26 June I tabled a written question which was answered by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. He stated:

"The proposed incinerator would constitute a registrable process under the Alkali and Radiochemical Works Regulation Act 1906 as amended by the Alkali and Radiochemical Works Order (Northern Ireland) 1991."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. *488*.]

Will the requirements and information contained in that answer be upgraded by the COSHH regulations which come into force tomorrow? My constituents and everyone downwind of the proposed incinerator in Northern Ireland would like to know the answer.

Is the Minister aware that the De Gaussa organisation in Germany has a chemical process to clean up hydrocarbons contaminated with PCBs leaving nothing but common salt behind? It is possible to unzip, as it were, the PCBs so that the waste is reduced to harmless salt. The possibility of dangerous emissions as a result of waste burning are therefore eliminated. If such technology is already available, people should spend a lot of money on developing it rather than taking the risk of burning the waste. No matter what one does with the incinerator plants, it is a question not of whether but of when something will go wrong—it is inevitable, and when things do go wrong I suspect that the operators will do their best to cover that up.

If there are any investigations into the proposed incinerator, does the Minister accept that those investigations should not be carried out by a university in Northern Ireland, especially Queens university, which has had a chair sponsored by the Du Pont company? I am not saying that the scientists and professors at Queens would be willing to dress up their reports, but some unkind people might think that. I should be much happier if the investigations were carried out by a body outside Northern Ireland.

Is the Minister prepared to give a guarantee to the people of Northern Ireland and to me that the new environmental protection scheme that the Prime Minister announced will have teeth at least as good as those of the United States Environmental Protection Agency. That American organisation, above all others, made the chemical companies and other polluters sit up and take notice. Will the Minister ensure that whatever form the environmental protection scheme takes in Northern Ireland, it will not be based in Belfast where it could have a cosy relationship with the Government and everyone else, but way out in the sticks where it would feel freer to take a good hard look at the job that it was supposed to do?

If what the spokesman from Du Pont says is correct and the company intends to reduce its waste disposal by about 70 per cent. by the end of the century, how on earth can it build an incinerator small enough to deal with that small amount of waste material? Or do the Government expect a huge increase in the amount of waste to be produced by new chemical plants in the island of Ireland? Those basic questions must be answered.

If an incinerator has to be built, a number of measures must be taken. It should not be owned or run by the company that produces the pollution, because those companies would do their damnedest to ensure that they reduced the cost to themselves. We all know that reducing costs leads to taking risks, which usually means that the plant blows up in our face. We have had enough of that. The nuclear technology scientists have persistently assured us that nuclear establishments are safe. I am sure that the people living in Flixborough and Bhopal were assured that the nearby chemical establishments were perfectly safe. However, whenever the pigeons come home to roost many people are hurt. The only way to ensure that a plant is run properly is for it to be run by an independent body.

Alternatively, all those who produce the waste could own a large chunk of the plant so that they did not pay simply for the burning of the waste created by Du Pont. If Du Pont owns the place it can charge whatever the dickens it likes, because it will be the only incinerator needed in the island of Ireland, and any other person producing material for incineration will be at the mercy of that company.

If an incinerator has to be built, it should not be built on the west coast but on the east coast, where the emissions from the chimney would blow out to sea 90 per cent. of the time.

Mr. Trimble: It will blow up to Scotland.

Mr. Ross: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Perhaps it should be right over on the east coast of Scotland. Despite the Minister's giggles, there is no point in building an incinerator where the emissions will be blown across Ulster. The wind blows from the south and west much of the time—the Minister knows that perfectly well—so the incinerator should be sited where the emissions will be blown out to sea. Much of the emission will come down in the first 20 miles if it comes down at all, so the decision is difficult.

Is there a small area health statistics unit based in Northern Ireland? If not, will one be created to look after the incinerator? The plant must be operated by highly skilled people. Will the Minister assure me that emissions will be fully scrubbed and that there will be a high-speed quenching of the gases?

The trouble is that one is always caught on the horns of a dilemma: should we trust the machinery, the computer, or the people? They all make errors and a balance must be struck. The risks must be minimised and, if humanly possible, an alternative technology—even if it is not ready for the next couple of years—should be used.

When people talk about state of the art technology, they mean technology that works on the laboratory bench. When it is upgraded and used on a large scale it does not necessarily behave as it did in the laboratory. We must therefore try to use not only state of the art technology,

but tried and tested state of the art technology. The problem is that technology must be tried out for the first time on a large scale, but I should prefer to have technology which I know works rather than experimental technology.

I hope that my questions have shown the concern that I and many of my constituents feel. I cannot believe that a 20,000 tonne incinerator is viable when I consider that the Cleanaway plant—a much larger general purpose plant—handles many multiples of that amount of waste. I also find it hard to credit that the plant can be built for £38 million, because the scrubbing equipment alone is very costly. Before we proceed, we must think carefully and either site the plant where the possibility of damage is minimised or, instead of an incinerator, use technology which, with a little more research, could be a real winner because it would reduce the material to salt and carbon dioxide.

In a written answer the Minister told me that

"At a meeting of the Anglo-Irish conference on 31 January 1991, I exchanged views on this and other environmental issues with the Minister for the Environment in the Irish Republic, Mr. Flynn. I have also discussed with the management of Du Pont (UK) Ltd., their proposal for a hazardous waste incinerator and have visited the company's site".—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. *445*.]

When I saw the wonderful information that the Minister had discussed at the Anglo-Irish conference I expected a detailed statement, but in fact the statement was only a couple of sentences long and told me nothing. Will the Minister now tell us whether he has done a deal with Mr. Flynn and the Government of the Irish Republic to build the incinerator in Northern Ireland to take all the hazardous materials produced in the Irish Republic? That would give the people of Northern Ireland the benefit of anything that comes out of the chimneys, which would confirm my view that the Irish Republic is always prepared to send the United Kingdom any muck that it possibly can, and we do not want it.

When I asked the Secretary of State for the Environment

"what information he has on the quantity of toxic and hazardous wastes arising from the operations of the Du Pont company in Northern Ireland which is transferred to the incinerators of the Cleanway and Raychem plants in Great Britain each year",

the answer was:

"None. Monitoring the movement of hazardous waste within the United Kingdom is the responsibility of local waste disposal authorities."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1991; Vol. 194, c. *141*.]

In Northern Ireland, that ranges from Belfast city council down to Moyle council, which looks after 10,000 people. Is the Minister trying to convince the hon. Members from Northern Ireland that all those local waste disposal authorities in the Province are capable of monitoring the movement of waste? I doubt whether they are even told about it. I wonder whether the health officials in the councils are aware of their responsibilities in that respect, because none of them has ever mentioned them to me. I was horrified to discover that there was no overall authority to oversee the movement of that hazardous waste.

LEDU is not my favourite organisation. The Minister said in his opening remarks that LEDU had promoted 7,000 jobs in the past year and 50,000 jobs since 1971. The real questions are not how many it has allegedly created but how many it has merely replaced and how many still exist. It is not a question of whether a job is created but whether a continuing job is created. We want industrial growth and more work in Northern Ireland—there is no point in creating jobs which simply disappear.

I make no apology for returning yet again to the problem of one of my constituents, to which I could now add the problems of a couple of others. When I asked about this in March, I received the usual bland reply. As the Minister knows, my constituent went to the commissioner of complaints, who found that he had not suffered through maladministration. That is a matter to which I hope to return when the ombudsman's reports come before the House, so I shall leave it for tonight.

In March I said that I believed then, and I still do now, that LEDU was simply not equipped to deal with inventors because it did not have the necessary machinery to cope with an idea from its invention through to its marketing—that expertise and capacity does not exist. I sometimes think that inventors as a body tend to look at the world in a slightly skewed way. If they did not, they would never come up with an idea. They have difficulties and do not necessarily have a vast amount of machinery or wealth behind them. Frequently, an individual comes up with an idea, which is what happened in the case of my constituent. I am deeply involved in the matter because the individual involved is a neighbour of mine. It is a long and complicated saga. I have a chunk of the file with me and I will gladly give it to the Minister if he wishes to spend the weekend reading it. I am concerned that an idea that I thought was a winner is still not on the market after several years.

The first bone of contention for the inventor involved the control of the project. It seems that help is sparse unless the set-up is acceptable to LEDU, which dictates what can and cannot be done and who will be involved. A Londonderry firm was apparently unacceptable to LEDU, and I often wonder why LEDU was unable to come up with another firm. My constituent and I had no objection to LEDU meeting the firm, but my constituent's bargaining position seemed to be undermined by LEDU's attitude, despite the fact that heads of agreement had already been drawn up, which caused the bone of contention.

Another factor involves the sheer cost of development and patent rights, and protecting those rights across the world. A good product must be protected and there is apparently no way in which a private individual can gain funds for that protection. It is important for ideas to be protected so that they can be brought to fruition and used, but there does not seem to be any help available to the individual. Inventors tend to spend to an enormous amount of their own time and money on their pet projects. Admittedly, not all the projects come to anything—many die the death—but the tenacity of the individuals often ensures that their ideas succeed.

Another factor relates to the grant aid for production. Basic engineering involved can be carried out in Ulster—the difficult part involves sales and promotion. When LEDU made an offer a year or so ago for a grant for market research, it seemed to be saying that the project had not been handled properly and it wanted to get off the hook. By that time, however, my constituent was so suspicious of LEDU and all its works that it was difficult to persuade him to go back to LEDU. I think that LEDU should carry out some market research of its own to find out whether my constituent's product can sell. If it

[Mr. Ross]

succeeds, as I am sure that it will, it will create many jobs in Northern Ireland. It is worth taking a risk with that project, and the Minister should get his finger out and take that risk.

Providing such assistance to inventors should be examined because inventors usually come up with only one good idea in their lifetime, and they want to hold on to it. If they do not, it will sometimes go down the plug hole. I should like more help to be given to them, from the inception of their idea until the product proves to be either a failure or a success. LEDU would make enough money out of the successes to pay for the failures.

Another one of my constituents invented a toilet seat that was operated by foot—*[Laughter.]* It seems laughable, and I appreciate that most people laugh at the idea—I did when I first encountered it—but the inventor said that Americans were going up the wall because of their fear of AIDS and reckoned that the product would sell well. Everyone who has looked at the fancy idea says that it will work. The idea is still floating around, waiting for help to take it from the invention to the development stage—*[Laughter.]* At least my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) seems to be enjoying this. We need a bit of light-heartedness in this establishment occasionally. It does not matter that the idea involved a toilet seat. If there is money and work in the idea, we should be glad of it.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): Where there's muck, there's money.

Mr. Ross: Yes, I agree.

In that case, an inventor came up with a project which, despite the hilarity, could be manufactured. Why have not greater efforts been made to help him?

Within the past week, another constituent came to me saying that he approached LEDU last September because he wanted to set up a gear cutting business. He said that he was the only person in Northern Ireland doing so, and his story concerned me. I had a word with him on the telephone earlier this evening to confirm what stage he had reached. He said that officials from LEDU made an appointment to come to see him in September or October last year but they did not turn up and he received a telephone call a day or two later to say that the officials' car had broken down which was why no one was able to come. The officials finally arrived in February—that hardly showed the proper amount of speed, efficiency and urgency necessary to promote industry in Northern Ireland and the officials then said that they would not give my constituent any money.

My constituent then went to Donegal and saw the Irish Development Agency in the Republic. He talked to an accountant and within one hour he was looking at premises. He received a telephone call one week later with an offer to go back to look at more premises and was offered all the grants in the world. He said that when he compared the two—the IDA and LEDU—LEDU did not know where to begin. He did not actually use those words but you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would reprove me if I uttered the ones that he used. My constituent has now bought five gear-cutting machines and the business is going full blast without money from LEDU. The Minister may think that that is good enough, but I do not. Will he please go and give that organisation a damned good shaking?

7.36 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in tonight's debate. I apologise to the Minister of State and other hon. Members for my absence at the start of the debate.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) made a strong plea about agriculture in Northern Ireland and today's news of the proposed changes in the common agricultural policy. The pressure from the general agreement on tariffs and trade negotiations is disturbing to us in Northern Ireland. I come from a constituency which is mainly made up of small farmers—both lowland and hillside—and they have great concerns about the future.

I realise that there is an apparent dichotomy between the requirements of an agricultural policy for Northern Ireland and that pertaining to Great Britain. I am sure that the Minister with responsibility for agriculture in Northern Ireland must be suffering from schizophrenia because what is needed in Northern Ireland, is to support the small farmer in every way possible, whereas that does not seem to be required by farmers in Great Briain. However, the Northern Ireland Office will be responsible for the final policy that is applied to Northern Ireland.

At present in Northern Ireland, there is a great thrust forward to rejuvenate and regenerate rural communities, which seems to be flying in the face of the agricultural policy on which we are about to embark, which will degenerate and lead to the degradation of the countryside in Northern Ireland as we know it.

In the previous appropriation debate, I asked the Minister to pass on to his ministerial colleagues the concept that, if the worst came to the worst—I know that we are a small cog in the big wheel of European and international politics—we need a financial package and a rescue operation that will at least blunt the most severe effects of the changes in the common agriculture policy, which will have a detrimental impact on small farmers. The preparation for that package needs to be in place now. It should not be an ill thought out, ill conceived, ill administered operation when the time comes. We are at the crossroads, at a time of potential emergency in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Agriculture is also responsible for fisheries. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) referred to some aspects of the fishing industry, claiming that one half of the catch came in through Portavogie. We can assume then that the other half comes in through South Down. Quotas are soon to be applied to parts of the fishing industry in the Irish sea, with the result that those fishing from the east coast of Northern Ireland, from Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel will suffer dramatically. Quotas on cod and haddock have been imposed to protect stocks in the North sea, but they are not necessarily relevant to the Irish sea.

It is clear from answers that I have received from the Minister who is responsible for the fisheries that the Department has not yet thought about a decommissioning programme. Fishermen have been squeezed out of their traditional inherited businesses but have received no help for decommissioning so as to prevent the over-fishing which the quotas are allegedly supposed to prevent. I ask

the Department to revise its attitude to a decommissioning scheme. Not much money would be involved for such a scheme in Northern Ireland, but we are talking about the livelihoods of the families attached to each fishing boat, and decommissioning definitely needs funding.

I am puzzled by another aspect of the fishing industry. We need a proper fishing training centre or school on the east coast of Northern Ireland. I should like to see one at Ardglass or Kilkeel. It could possibly be linked to the fine establishment in Greencastle in north Donegal across in the Irish Republic. Such a centre would ensure that young people who were left in the industry were properly trained in fishing techniques, in conservation and in new technology. Again, this would not involve a huge sum.

These young people do not seem to receive the same sympathy and help as those pursuing other careers. For instance, they have to pay their own way to these schools. University graduates, those who attend Government training centres and those who go to colleges of further education receive assistance—but not youngsters being trained for fishing. Will the Department review its policy on this important area?

As for training under the Department of Economic Development, the Under-Secretary will know that all my constituency has is an annexe of a training centre. Several times, I have urged the Minister to provide a modest expansion programme for the training college so that it can increase the number of subjects it teaches in a modest way. We have virtually no public transport in the constituency—no railways, and the bus service is thin on the ground and does not cater for travelling workers or a travelling training force. Only a modest sum would be involved in this idea.

The main thrust of policy of the Department of Economic Development must be job creation. I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) about LEDU. My experience of LEDU does not equate with his. I believe that it is better geared to helping small businesses begin and expand. We live in an era of small business expansion. I should not like LEDU's expertise in this area to be swamped by its being reabsorbed into the parent body, the Industrial Development Board. Today, the Northern Ireland Economic Council made some suggestions to that effect, on which I have not time to report in detail, but we should think carefully before accepting those suggestions.

An important element of the work of the Industrial Development Board is attracting inward investment. I ask the Minister to use his best endeavours to obtain back office development for Northern Ireland. I make a plea for South Down, which has a very weak industrial infrastructure and which could easily benefit from this type of development. We are fully linked up with international fibre-optic communications throughout the constituency, and back office developments can be plugged in almost anywhere in the constituency at little cost. The same can be said of many other constituencies in Northern Ireland.

I know that the Minister and the Northern Ireland Office are committed to fair employment as embodied in the legislation, but it is important also that jobs should be fairly distributed—the more so given the peculiar circumstances of Northern Ireland where, for all sorts of reasons, communities may be divided into hostile sections. It is therefore not always easy to travel to a workplace in a community different from one's own. New jobs must be fairly distributed—more so than they have been in the past. We know the number of visits made by the IDB to South Down from the answers to parliamentary questions. I will not bore the House by repeating the statistics, but they show an appalling lack of equality of job opportunity.

The Minister will know from having tasted the fruits of South Down that the tourist industry there has great potential for development. Of course tourism is important throughout Northern Ireland—tourism is a very saleable commodity in the European and North American markets—but there is a problem with what I call St. Patrick's country and the Mournes. Both have a high reputation on many continents.

We have never been able to put together a package comparable to the excellent ones produced for the Fermanagh lakeland and the north coast tourist area. If we could put together a Mourne-St. Patrick's country concept, we would enhance tourism and the potential for jobs in the area from Carlingford lough to Strangford lough. That is a hobby horse of mine. Many potentially exciting infrastructure developments for tourism are on the drawing board and could be translated into reality.

The next vote relates to the Department of Education. Tremendous hardship and disappointment and a sense of failure have been created throughout Northern Ireland by the failure to operate a fair and total transfer system. The Minister knows that by and large, those who have obtained grades 1 and 2 in the 11-plus examination are supposed to be entitled to grammar school education in Northern Ireland. There is also an entitlement to parental choice, which is one of the great thrusts in the Government's promotion of the reform of education.

Last year, many pupils suffered damage to their potential careers because they were unable to obtain the education to which their examination results entitled them. It is possible to excuse that because last year was the first time that that happened, but it is not acceptable for the debacle to be repeated this year. However, matters are even worse this year, and the numbers reported in the Northern Ireland press yesterday, if accurate, reflect nothing short of an educational scandal. Boys and girls who have done their best and worked hard and have received the results of their hard work are being deprived of what they thought would be their reward. That is totally unacceptable and a most inhumane way to start people on their careers.

The Minister must ensure that places are available for those pupils, not next year but this year. Places are being denied because of a paper exercise. Many schools have the capacity to take those children, but because of a Ministry rule of thumb and a paper figure, it is not happening. It is not a question of accommodation or finance, but one of administration, and it could be corrected tomorrow by the stroke of a pen. Perhaps that request could be passed to the Minister who is responsible for education, so that he can take immediate action.

Much has been said about the environment. As I listened to the right hon. Member for Strangford, I wondered whether there would be any money left in the kitty for a road or two in constituencies other than Strangford. From his previous portfolio in Northern Ireland, the Minister is aware that not a pound has been spent on major capital programmes in my constituency over the past 13 years. I may be open to correction on that, but I do not think so.

There are only two class B roads in my constituency, which has no railway system. We are trying to lay the

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

foundations for a tourist industry that would create jobs for our young people, and we will not succeed unless we have reasonable road communications because, as I have said, we have no railways. We have a fine and developing harbour in Warrenpoint, but it is served by only one major road from one direction. There is not even a class A road on which goods can be transported from other directions.

The right hon. Member for Strangford spoke about the fishing industry and about the heavy articulated and refrigerated lorries from the two major fishing ports of Kilkeel and Ardglass. The roads are not built for such transport, although some minor works are under way to try to improve them. I am not asking for dual carriageways, because we are so unused to them that we would not know which side to drive on. However, even one class A road in the constituency would be greatly appreciated because it would help industrial development by providing a better infrastructure.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East spoke about pollution and about an incinerator for the Foyle area. Since the mid-1940s, there has been pollution in the Irish sea. That has been going on for 45 years, and for a long time we have had continuous daily radioactive discharges from Sellafield. There have also been more than 100 major and minor accidents, atmospheric and from the pipeline in the Irish sea, resulting in the discharge of materials with fairly high radioactivity. The issue contains an element of farce, because now there is to be deep land storage of low-level and medium-level radioactive material from Sellafield.

About two years ago, I attended a meeting in London held by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. We were issued with a glossy and attractive book detailing the great geological survey which BNFL intended to make of the whole of Great Britain to find a suitable dumping area. One of the basic requirements was a sound rock structure. At that meeting, I said that, at the end of the day, the selected site would be Sellafield, because the criterion was money and not safety or the environment. Lo and behold, the selected site for the deep storage in rock was at Sellafield. That is curious, because the most mobile geological fault in the British Isles runs from north to south through the Isle of Man to Cumbria. There have been tremors in that area in the past couple of years, some of them substantial. In spite of that, Sellafield was the area found to be most suitable.

The Minister should hold a brief for the people of Northern Ireland against the vested interests taking such decisions. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East also spoke about the transport of toxic wastes. Toxic wastes of the worst kind—radioactive wastes—continually ply up and down the Irish sea in ships bringing dirt from all over the world. If Japan can send its nuclear waste to Britain for processing, it must be an expensive operation and the Japanese must be damn glad to get rid of it. However, the waste does not go back, it stays here.

I was one of the first to visit Sellafield before it became a "tourist" centre and I saw vat after vat of stuff that will be there for 10,000 or 50,000 years. That is a sobering and frightening thought. Everyone should take the opportunity to visit Sellafield, if only to sample the so-called pleasures of a conducted tour. People will come away frightened, as I did, by the prospect in evidence there.

In terms of the Department of Health, the Minister's responsibility, rather than the requirement of the health boards, is to ensure that people are given adequate and equal access to health care. I should like him to consider what is happening in my constituency. It has no major hospital, only two minor hospitals—Downe hospital in Downpatrick and Mourne hospital at Kilkeel. The Southern board is threatening to close the Kilkeel hospital right at the foot of the Mournes without any consideration of the tremendous distances and the difficulty of the travel which someone who was seriously ill in the area would have to undertake.

The Minister once held the portfolio for health in Northern Ireland, so he knows about the arguments that I and others have been advancing for generations about the final stage of Downe hospital in Downpatrick. That campaign is one of my earliest political memories, from 1956, and the project is still no further up the line.

The Eastern health board carried out a survey of its hospitals, including Downe hospital, which showed clearly that in spite of the appalling physical conditions under which the surgeons, the other doctors and the nursing staff operate, it is the most cost-effective hospital in Northern Ireland. What could it not do if it received the modest boost of the completion of the third phase—the psychiatric, geriatric and maternity provision? In health provision terms, the medical centre would not require an enormous amount of money. It has been designed to cost about £8 million to £10 million, and that would easily be saved on upkeep during the next couple of years.

I know that the Minister has two plans in front of him. One is from the Eastern health board, which has accepted —as has the Department over the years—the need to complete the project, but no one ever does anything about it. Ministerial intervention is required, especially now that we have quangos instead of representative health boards.

It is significant that three homes in my constituency are closing—the St. Leonard's home in Rostrevor has already closed, and I understand that the Spelga house residence at Banbridge and Mourne house, in Newcastle, are also to close. In other words, there is a consistent rundown of public health care provision. At the same time in the area —and, indeed, in the Belfast area, where the hospitals are gathered around like doughnuts—the waiting lists for chiropody, coronary heart care, hearing therapists and orthodontic provision are lengthening. The evidence shows that the services are not being delivered and that service quality provision is contracting rather than expanding.

The Minister may be surprised that I do not intend to complain about the amount of money provided for social security. I shall not complain about that, because my present complaint is more serious—it is about the administration of social security, and the effect that that has on the people who come into my constituency surgery.

Why can people looking after children with cystic fibrosis not obtain attendance allowance, when such children require the same care as other children? That is nonsense. Children with cystic fibrosis require very special care. Many of them need not only constant physical care but enzyme treatment and many other complicated medical procedures.

I had a case in my surgery the other week in which the parents had already lost two children through cystic fibrosis and now had a third child, also with cystic fibrosis. They were refused attendance allowance on the ground

that the child did not need care different from that required by a child without the disease. That is administrative nonsense, which should be dealt with.

A young, totally deaf boy had his attendance allowance withdrawn because it was said that he did not need more care and attention than someone with full hearing capacity. What sort of nonsense is that? The evidence of one's eyes is denied by the social security officers and the tribunal.

The same thing happens with mobility allowance. Again, there is a parade through my surgery of people who cannot get mobility allowance. So far as I can see, the only people who can be sure of getting it are those who cannot move at all, because they are dead. A girl badly affected by Down's syndrome and could not walk, did not have the mental capacity or the will to walk, yet she was refused mobility allowance. Another girl had had her arm amputated, had a twisted spine and a difficult gait, because she dragged her legs. Such people are refused mobility allowance because of the weird criterion that they have to be unable or virtually unable to walk. When it comes to the appeal stage, it seems that the only people who can get mobility allowance are those with no legs. I ask the Minister to consider the administration rather than the allocation of the money, and to examine how it is spent.

The consequences of the administration of the social fund, which was set up in April 1988, have been horrific. It often creates poverty rather than resolving it. In December 1989, the Child Poverty Action Group carried out a survey which, with a strong use of statistics, showed clearly that the social fund system was inadequate and was creating a new poverty trap.

Last month, the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network gave evidence beyond a doubt that the social fund was exacerbating the poverty trap. I have many case histories showing that, but I shall not give all the details. I simply ask how social security officers can refuse a destitute young girl a grant to obtain clothes, and how they can refuse the mother of seven children, who had no clothes, a clothing grant. How can a young man just released from gaol, who had nothing, be refused a few pounds to get himself a few respectable things?

Should we not be trying to prevent people being put into gaols or other institutions? Are we not trying to assist the rehabilitation of such people? If grants are not given to such worthy cases, who will be given them?

There is a big gap in the administration of the system, in that such people may be offered loans, but they have no money to pay them back. Some people are refused loans because they already have a loan. I am not talking about usury or about high street lending banks; I am talking about ordinary people who cannot pay their way and buy a reasonably respectable suit of clothes or a dress, or provide food for themselves.

Mr. William Ross: Has the hon. Gentleman, like me, come across cases of people getting loans from money sharks at high rates of interest? One of my constituents has to pay back £2,000 over two years, having borrowed only £1,000.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention in support of what I am saying, and I agree with him. There are many such examples. Back-street moneylending is an enterprise industry in Northern Ireland at the moment. Some people are borrowing from moneylenders to pay back social security loans. That is a ridiculous situation, and we shall have to get out of it.

We see many adverts in our local newspapers saying that people are not applying for family credit, but I shall explain what happens to the self-employed. I shall say more about the phrase "self-employed" in a moment, but I am not talking about wealthy people who are not entitled to family credit. When a self-employed person claims family credit, he is in for an administrative nightmare.

Who are the self-employed people I am talking about? Every brickie, every plasterer, every carpenter and every agricultural labourer. All of them are classified as self-employed because of the system now operated in the economy. Previously, such people would have fallen within a pay-as-you-earn system and would have been able to get certificates of income without any bother. Under the present system, however, they are self-employed and have to produce accounts proving their income and net income.

The questions coming from the social security administration in Northern Ireland would drive anyone to distraction. The most minute expense is queried. I have heard of queries and requests for an analysis in respect of £10-worth of repairs to a car. In the face of that situation, people are switched off and go to the moneylenders to try to supplement their income, even though they are entitled to social security benefits.

Will the Minister look at the matter urgently? The officers administering the system have no concept of people's income—never mind how to arrive at it and how to prove it. I have been to tribunals with such officers, and even the tribunals have no concept of the income and expenditure of self-employed people. They do not know the first principles. They are flying by the seat of their pants in reaching decicisions.

I emphasise that, in referring to the self-employed, I am referring to nearly every person in Northern Ireland, other than shop assistants. I am talking about all those in the construction industry and many of those in agriculture and the fishing industry. I am talking about very small, poor, self-employed people who are being denied family credit because of administrative incompetence and lack of feeling. I ask the Minister urgently to revise the administration—rather than the quantum—of the funding.

8.11 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): It is obvious from many of the matters raised in the debate so far that there is an urgent need to find a better way of dealing with Northern Ireland appropriations. Something must be done to provide greater democracy for the people of Northern Ireland, and to enable them, through their Members of Parliament, to have a say in the governance of Northern Ireland. While we wait for the restoration of a Northern Ireland assembly with powers, there is a duty on this Government to establish a Select Committee on Northern Ireland affairs without further delay. That is needed, and it is the very least that the Government must do to give a semblance of democracy to the Province.

We are here to speak for the people. I must say that I disagreed with the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), who criticised business men for allegedly meddling in politics. Business men are part of the community. Their businesses may fail or falter as a result

[Mr. James Kilfedder]

of what politicians say or do. I expect—indeed, implore—business men to express their opinions to me and to other Northern Ireland Members so that we know what is in their minds, just as I expect people from other sectors of the community in the Province to tell us what they wish us to say in their name. We depend upon business men to generate jobs in the Province and I welcome all business men, and particularly small business men who employ a few people as they get their businesses going.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) referred to incinerators, and posed a series of questions. I listened to his speech with the utmost respect; the House should be grateful to him for what he said on the subject. Incinerators are undoubtedly a hazard to health. In many cases, the fumes are dangerous to human beings who live in the vicinity, or downwind of, an incinerator. We are speaking of ordinary incinerators but, as the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said, there is also that incinerator—if I may call it that—at Sellafield, which is sending its fumes over to Northern Ireland. We must do everything possible to resist that health hazard.

Greater attention must be paid to defending the environment in Northern Ireland. It is constantly under attack, particularly from speculators who have litte or no regard for residents in a particular area and whose main and only concern is profit. Many parts of Northern Ireland have been ruined as a result of speculation.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) launched an attack on planning officials for always refusing planning applications. The planning authorities have my full support because, if a planning applicant is refused, he can appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission. People frequently do appeal and, sadly, the Planning Appeals Commission often allows their appeals, even when local people object to the application. That is why I continue to insist that the law should be changed to enable objectors to appeal against a planning permission if they live in the area and are affected by a particular development.

I come now to Castlereagh college. I was pleased to learn from the principal that the South-Eastern education and library board has agreed, following representations—including representations from me—to make a grant towards the cost of community education at what was formerly the Dundonald girls high school. Sadly, the amount of grant does not come anywhere near the amount that was requested and I urge the Minister responsible for education to intervene because the scheme to provide community adult education for the people of the Dundonald and Tullycarnet areas is all-important.

I go further in my appeal to the Minister by repeating my request that the Dundonald girls high school should be devoted entirely to providing recreational, as well as educational, facilities for residents in the area. I mentioned the swimming pool, which has been out of commission for some years. The swimming pool should be restored and other facilities provided—especially for elderly people and young people who live in Dundonald and Tullycarnet.

Insufficient provision is made for residents of housing estates in Northern Ireland. It is not sufficient merely to throw up houses. More facilities must be provided because the people living on housing estates have other needs which must be satisfied. Take the Tullycarnet housing estate, for instance. It has a totally inadequate community hall. It is inadequate in size for an area as big as Tullycarnet, and I fear that the structure is not perfectly sound. Surely it is essential to provide an adequate building for community facilities in Tullycarnet.

I should emphasise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am deliberately keeping my remarks as brief as possible so that my hon. Friends from other constituencies can take part in the debate. Nevertheless, I take this opportunity to repeat my charge that the Eastern health board, acting as the minion of the Government, and the Department of Health, are undermining hospital services in the North Down area. Over the years, the hospitals in my constituency have done everything humanly possible to save money and to cut out any fat that may have existed. However, a few months ago, the Eastern health board announced proposals that will impose further restrictions on the facilities that can be provided. Because of that decision, further beds will be closed.

When the proposals were first made known, I immediately arranged a meeting with the head of the management committee for North Down at which the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and I protested about the cuts. The Ulster and Bangor hospitals are about to suffer serious cuts in the money required to provide a proper service. It is not as if there is no waiting list or that people do not want to go to those hospitals. There are long waiting lists and people need treatment. Nevertheless, beds in the Ulster and Bangor hospitals have already been closed, and now further beds are to be closed. The financial restrictions will undermine the morale of doctors, nurses and ancillary staff, as well as denying a proper service for the people of the North Down area.

The health board says that people can go to the hospitals in Belfast. Those hospitals are also part of the eastern health board and, sadly, they drain money away from the hospitals in north Down—money that is vital for their survival. I would not deny money to the hospitals in Belfast if they can get it—and they do—from the Eastern health board. My protest is about the discrimination against the people of North Down because insufficient money is being provided for the Ulster and Bangor hospitals.

According to the chairman of the British Medical Association, the United Kingdom spends 5·4 per cent. of gross domestic product on health, compared with 6·7 per cent. in France and 6·3 per cent. in Germany. We hear a great deal about the failure of Germany and France to make proper provision for their people, but I think that the United Kingdom is lagging behind them. The Government are directly—and indirectly through the Eastern health board, undermining the NHS in the North Down area. The BMA says that an increase of £6 billion is necessary for the United Kingdom, which is a 1 per cent. GDP increase, to bring the United Kingdom level up to that of the continent.

More money must be provided for the Ulster and Bangor hospitals to prevent further bed closures. We need a fully operational hospital at Bangor, as it is a densely populated area with a high proportion of elderly people. The people of North Down are extremely angry, as I am, at the way in which the Government are bleeding the NHS in my constituency. The position is exacerbated because money is being drained away to Belfast, especially to the tower block at the City hospital. I understand that beds in that tower block are empty, yet those beds cost more to

run than beds in the Ulster and Bangor hospitals. Beds at those two hospitals will be closed so that patients can be provided for that white elephant in Belfast.

That is all that I wish to say tonight on the matter. I hope that the Government will heed what the people of North Down are saying, and give them a fair deal.

8.24 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am glad to have the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder), who is right to fight for his constituents. However, I think that many of his constituents are thankful for the tower block at the City hospital in Belfast. It serves the community. It would be helpful if the people of Bangor would travel to the hospital by rail rather than by car. There is a good railway halt just outside the hospital.

The International Rose conference will be held in Belfast next week, and that will be followed by one stage of the tall ships race. It is an example of the co-operation between the Government, the city council and private enterprise, which will give the world a proper picture of our city. So often, it has adverse reports in the media, which finds it easier to report a bang rather than the good things that are happening. I pay tribute to those who are trying to revitalise the city. On occasions such as this, we often deal with individual problems—and I shall do so—and with particular problems affecting the Province. However, it is also important to put on record the positive aspects in the Province.

Vote 3, under the DHSS, deals specifically with grants. Earlier today, I was speaking to an Australian Member of Parliament, who said that Australia could not run its social services without the support of the Churches and voluntary organisations. The same is true in the United Kingdom. The Government must continue to support the voluntary bodies that support care in the community and help those in need. Recently, the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus appointed a full-time representative in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will consider some pump priming to help that organisation in its work.

The press recently reported that while there may be a low incidence of AIDS and HIV in Northern Ireland—and rightly so—there was no ground for complacency. The problem is growing, and how it starts and how it spreads may become known in time. I am concerned that in a community that has a strong Christian conviction, and where the Churches try to help in the education of the community, the Government have consistently refused to help with their AIDS education programme. I understand that the Government have targeted AIDS education through their own education teams, but they should recognise the work of the Churches, and it is important that that work is supported.

The Government have also refused to support their care programmes. The tragedy is that representatives of voluntary bodies have been told that because of their directive approach and the position that they hold on sex education and sexual standards, their policy runs contrary to the way that the Government want to handle the matter. There is a case for reminding the young and the old that there is an abuse of the body that must be stopped for the well-being and health of society.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the advice given to young people by the Brook advisory centres operating here on the mainland would be completely unacceptable to the majority of people in Northern Ireland?

Rev. Martin Smyth: That was not specifically on the point that I was dealing with, but I agree with my hon. Friend. We know that across the community there is deep concern about the manner of the approach and the approach itself.

On the Department of Health and Social Services vote 4, I share the concerns that have already been expressed about the allowances and, more particularly, about the way in which those allowances are granted and the appeals of those who have applied for mobility, attendance or invalid care allowances are treated.

I do not know whether directions from the top have meant that folk have been turned down in order to save money, but some of the medical referees who have carried out examinations have been careless and, as a result, people have been turned down. For example, one person was turned down as a result of past injuries. The medical referee claimed in his report that he was shot in the ankle when he was shot through the lungs—a little way away from the ankle.

A woman was turned down because she was described as a manageress. When I represented her at the tribunal, my first question was what she was a manageress of, to which she replied that she was the manageress of a wine store where she had had to lift crates and so on. Those who assessed whether such people were entitled to benefits were not doing their work properly. We must tighten up and give clearer directions not simply to save money but to ensure that the applicant is entitled to the allowance.

Some years ago, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), told me that there was a research project on the care of the elderly. Has that research project been completed, what have been its findings and, more importantly, what are the Government doing to implement the best service for the elderly in the community?

I would ask that some of the money in vote 4 might be used to promote hearing therapists. As I have said on other occasions, when some of my English friends, particularly English Ministers, say, "I hear what you say," I am not sure that they do. There is a great need in the community for hearing therapy to help those who have hearing impediments so that they can take their proper place in the community.

With regard to the Department of Education, Northern Ireland vote 2, I again pay tribute to the work done in education. However, I want to make two specific pleas about university education. First, I understand that finances available for ancillary staff have been tightened. I regret that some people seem to think that ancillary staff are lesser mortals than academic staff or, in the hospitals, the surgeons, doctors and so on. Yet all would admit that, without those ancillary staff, things would be in a real mess. I use the word "mess" correctly. Three years ago, youngsters in a school in the city turned their noses down or up—however one described it—when a youngster in the classroom said that her daddy was a bin man. They did not think that a bin man was up to much. However, when the bin men went on strike shortly afterwards, they soon

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

discovered how much we need them. I plead that the work of the university will not be impeded because of a tightening of finance.

At the same time, is the Department doing anything specific to promote the universities, or is it relying on the Universities Central Council on Admissions or the universities themselves? Is the Department doing something to restore the balance between universities in Northern Ireland and those in England and Scotland? Many of our young people go to English and Scottish universities but we are not getting enough from England to give us a proper balance. We are thankful that there has been an increase in international students, both in the University of Ulster and Queen's university but, as I understand it, the mix of students is one of the benefits of university life. I would like to think that for the benefit of us all we might see more students coming from Scotland and England to take their place in the fine institutions of Northern Ireland.

What is the Department's policy following the decision of Parliament that mentally and physically handicapped children should be integrated into the normal education system? I confess that I was not happy when that decision was taken because we destroyed a fine special education system. But having said that, the decision was taken, so what are we doing to give parents and children the schools of their choice as they have been promised?

I have discovered that the Northern education and library board set up a committee to consider the matter, but I am more concerned by a letter from the Minister which says that the money that is directed for a child in need may be kept centrally to provide what is thought to be the best education for that child. Since the Government took that decision to have integrated education throughout the country, does not the Department consider that it should be providing the funds to meet the challenge and needs in the community? We cannot simply leave it to boards to try to wrestle with the demands upon their finances and then make it difficult for children to have the benefit of that education.

I appreciate that in some cases there may be real difficulties, but I do not accept the view of one education psychologist that it may be possible to teach physically handicapped young people in ordinary schools, but mentally handicapped children cannot be taught in such a situation. There are those who are not so extremely mentally handicapped; some of them may be much wiser than the rest of us. But if an education psychologist takes that line, he shunts such children into segmented education without necessarily giving them the best chance of being educated.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) in his plea for environmental protection agencies. To some extent, that goes against my views, because I do not like quangos, but if I have to choose between a quango doing its work and two Government Departments making a mess of that work, I will go for the quango.

The actions of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland leave a lot to be desired. There is a growing green lobby in Northern Ireland. Throughout the Province, people are worried about what is happening to the environment. I fully sympathise with the hon. Member for North Down, who talked about planning appeals. Planners allow the green belt to be built upon and ride roughshod over the wishes of local people. It is time that somebody called a halt. The Minister knows that the Foyle Commission, or somebody else, has allowed nets to be placed in such a position that salmon are prevented from going up river. The Department of Agriculture must ensure that our rivers are properly stocked again.

There is an agency to protect the environment in Great Britain. I want to know what is to happen in Northern Ireland. A similar agency has been refused for the Province, on the ground that the various Departments can look after the environment themselves. Unless it is a question of setting a thief to catch a thief, I am not sure that the Departments can look after themselves.

Under the Department of Economic Development, vote 1, money has been set aside, among other things, for parking. Is the Department ready to introduce a scheme, in city areas and elsewhere, of residents-only parking? Does it intend that people should continue to park their cars in side streets? Motorists have to park where they can. If parking meters are installed around Donegall pass, motorists will put their cars in side streets that were never designed for traffic. The purpose of parking meters is to reduce the number of parked cars, but residents now find it difficult to park their cars in the bays outside their houses. What are the Department's plans for parking?

As for vote 2, I share the concern of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East about the Local Enterprise Development Unit. My particular concern is the Federation of Youth Enterprises. For years it has sought permission to develop its scheme, but time and time again it has been given the run around. It has become obvious during the last two years that LEDU has set its mind against the use of a particular site, ostensibly because it does not meet what it believes is required by the two communities. The committee consists of local professional people and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland. They all say that the site at Annandale should be used, but LEDU says no. It wants to move elsewhere. However, we have discovered that it has even blocked the development there. I hope that the Minister will look again at why the Federation of Youth Enterprises has been impeded for four or five years in its attempts to develop the useful work that it does in south Belfast.

Despite what people say about south Belfast being affluent, a large number of needy, elderly people and unemployed young people live there. In one area in my constituency—Lower Ravenhill—there is 20 per cent. unemployment. Anyone who states that south Belfast is affluent must have forgotten that it contains, apart from wealthy Malone, Sandy Row, Donegall road, Lower Lisburn road, Taughmonagh, Ormeau road, the Markets area, Woodstock and Ravenhill. They are all working-class areas. I should like to think that the Department will start to help us to train young people by means of the Federation of Youth Enterprises.

8.44 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): The first matter that I should like to raise is the tragedy that occurred last evening in north Antrim. I draw the attention of the House to the number of unmanned level crossings in Northern

Ireland. In August 1989, Northern Ireland. In August 1989, Northern Ireland Railways advised the Department of Transport in London and the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland that it proposed to convert 11 unmanned level crossings into automatic half-barrier crossings. Those crossings included the two where tragedies took place recently—the one at Slaght and the other at Broughdone.

Progress has been made towards the restoration of those barriers, but on 1 March 1990—six months later—three fatalities occurred at the Slaght crossing. After that tragedy I, together with others, urged the Department of the Environment and Northern Ireland Railways to carry out the work that they had promised that they would do. I also raised the matter in the House on several occasions. I had joint consultations with representatives of the Department of the Environment and Northern Ireland Railways. On each occasion, I was assured that the matter was being dealt with urgently.

I presented evidence to the Department of the Environment and Northern Ireland Railways supporting my view that unmanned crossings were very dangerous and potential death traps. I drew their attention to various matters, such as the record of what had happened at unmanned crossings in Northern Ireland. In 1989, a 33-year-old woman was killed and her two children were injured when their car was in collision with a train at Cromore crossing near Portstewart. In 1987, a young couple on a motor bike were killed at an unmanned crossing near Ballymoney. Three years later, a man died when his van was in collision with a train at another crossing at Dunloy. In 1986, a soldier was a killed and another injured when their Land Rover was struck by a train at the Shackleton crossing near Ballykelly. Those were all unmanned level crossings.

At what speed is it assumed that a train will be travelling if a 27-second warning time is allowed for the lights to go on as a train approaches a crossing? For the benefit of the House, there are exactly 27 seconds from the time the train hits the trigger on the track until it crosses the level crossing. One may say that that is a very short time, but the Department and Northern Ireland Railways told me that the purpose behind the 27 seconds is that there is not too long a time for a car to sit at the crossing once the lights start flashing.

I was also asked how long it would take a women pushing a pram over a crossing to unstrap her child from the pram and lift it to safety if one of the wheels of the pram became jammed between the rails. Would she be capable of clearing the track in the 27 seconds?

Another question was how long it would take for a train travelling at the maximum permitted speed of 70 mph on Northern Ireland Railways track to come to a standstill? What distance would be required for that train to stop? A train travelling at 70 mph covers 924 yards in 27 seconds.

I raised many of those points with the Department and with Northern Ireland Railways. On 4 September 1990 I received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), which answered a further query that I raised about the matter during Question Time on 19 July 1990. The letter stated:

"In Northern Ireland, NIR identified a list of 11 crossings to which alterations should be made in the light of the Stott criteria. These were the crossings notified to the Department in August 1989. It has not been possible, however, for NIR to carry the proposal forward pending the outcome of the trial of the prototypes and the drafting requirements by the Railway Inspectorate. Now that that stage has been reached NIR will be able to do 2 things. Firstly they will be able to order material and undertake the design work necessary for the modification of the existing controls."

The letter continued:

"I am assured that NIR will proceed expeditiously. For its part the Department will give the applications priority to allow NIR to implement the programme as quickly as possible."

That was on 4 September 1990.

As someone who has worked in the construction industry, I am well aware that specifications must be met. In October 1990 I was given those specifications—the design of the crossings, photographs of the crossings and other related details. That was in October 1990, but to date not one unmanned level crossing in Northern Ireland has had any of the half-barriers fitted.

Last night, Mr. Robinson was killed at a crossing a few miles further down the line from the Slaght crossing. We cannot speculate on the cause of the accident, but we can protest that, even at this stage, the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Railways have not expedited an extremely urgent proposal which had been recommended by Professor Stott and which affects the safety of all who travel—locals and visitors—on Northern Ireland's roads.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I agree that this is a very serious matter. As the hon. Gentleman knows, statutory orders must be proceeded with before the new half-barriers can be introduced. The hon. Gentleman asked a question to which I replied at the end of February this year listing the dates when the orders would be passed and when work would start. So far as I am aware, the hon. Gentleman has not since told me or the Department that the programme that we had set out should be speeded up even more.

Mr. Forsythe: Is the Minister suggesting that despite his letter to me and despite my interest in this matter from the beginning, I must continuously—week after week and month after month—stay on the backs of officials in the transport section of the Department of the Environment and of Northern Ireland Railways to ensure that they carry out their statutory duties to the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: No, I am not suggesting that. I am saying that the hon. Gentleman has known since the end of February what the programme was and how it would be proceeded with. If the hon. Gentleman had felt at that time that a further delay was intolerable, he could have said so, but he did not. That does not mean that the programme should not be proceeded with as quickly as possible, but it takes time to push through the necessary procedures.

Mr. Forsythe: Is the Minister telling the House that, although he sent the letter to say that things were under way, I should have continued to press the Minister, his Department and Northern Ireland Railways to do something for which an application was made in August 1989? The application from Northern Ireland Railways was made to the Department in August 1989 and I received the specifications in my possession in October

[Mr. Forsythe]

1990. We are now in July 1991. Surely the Minister is not suggesting that I should take over his job in Northern Ireland.

I am very disappointed by that reply. I should have thought that the Minister, knowing of a colleague's concern about the matter, would have assumed that when he wrote to that hon. Member, the hon. Member would take him at his word and assume that the Minister would ensure that the work would be done. Sadly, as the Minister sits and I stand in the House in July 1991, no work has been carried out by Northern Ireland Railways to erect half-barriers on the unmanned level crossings, as it was supposed to do.

In view of the paragraph from the earlier letter, the further letter sent to me by the Minister and the fact that I have had the detailed specifications and drawings of such crossings since 12 October 1990, why do the Department of the Environment and Northern Ireland Railways appear to have failed in their duty to those who trust them to carry out their responsibility to keep road and rail users as safe as is humanly possible? Why does the Minister appear to have failed in his duty to ensure that the work was carried out?

I readily concede that no Minister can know about every little nut and bolt in his Department. However, as the Minister knows, it is a parliamentary tradition that Ministers answer to the House for their charge. I submit to the House that in this matter, the Minister appears to have failed to honour his commitment to the House. I am very disappointed that the Minister seeks to shift the blame from himself, from his Department and from Northern Ireland Railways, to the shoulders of a Member of Parliament who has continually urged them to carry out their duty. Now I have had the experience of hearing of yet another death at an unmanned level crossing—and I leave aside the question how the accident occurred.

Mr. Needham: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am not trying to shift the blame, least of all on to his shoulders. As he points out, nobody could have done more than he has to raise the matter. The dates that I sent him at the end of February for the start of the schemes were the earliest available dates on which the barriers could be introduced. That is why he tabled his question and I replied to it. I was told that that was the earliest point at which the work could be begun.

The only point that I make to the hon. Gentleman is that, at the time when I gave him the figures, he did not say to me that it was not good enough, that the start should be sooner, or that this or that should be done. However, that does not alter the fact that I agree that we must get on as quickly as we can. In view of what the hon. Gentleman says, I will look at the matter again immediately to see whether there is any way to bring the dates forward.

Mr. Forsythe: I thank the Minister for clearing the matter up. May I seek his assurance in the House that he will endeavour, to the best of his ability, to ensure that half-barriers are fitted to at least the 11 unmanned level crossings that were decided on in August 1989?

Mr. Needham: If there is any way in which we can bring forward the dates of which I informed the hon. Gentleman in my written answer of 25 February, I give him my assurance that we shall do so.

Mr. Forsythe: I thank the Minister for his confident reply and I look forward to action being taken on the matter as soon as possible.

The Minister will also be aware of my views on planning—a matter that other hon. Members have raised. The Minister probably heard me intervene on the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and refer to the market at Nutt's Corner. Perhaps the Minister can assure me on that matter, too. I will give way again if he wishes to intervene. I am keen to give way. I will be fair to the Minister, as he also is concerned about the matter. It really is out of order for anyone not only to decide to have a market in an area in which there is no planning permission but to make a new access to a main road—an A road—to bring in stands for that market and to put up a sign which clearly states "New Sunday Market". No application has been made, local people are up in arms, and the planning department is telling me that it is doing its best but that it is working under great difficulty.

Mr. Needham: I do not want to take up too much time, as other hon. Members wish to speak. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I sympathise with his point about Nutt's Corner. Any market in Northern Ireland can operate for up to 14 days or 14 times in a year without a licence. After that, it must apply. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as soon as the 14 days have passed, we shall deal with the matter. I assure the hon. Gentleman, too, that we shall ensure that the regulations in respect of the existing market, which will come before the courts on 26 July, are also dealt with. I do not intend to give up the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Instead of seeking to turn the debate into a dialogue, perhaps some of those matters might be dealt with by the Minister when he seeks to catch my eye.

Mr. Forsythe: I take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I always do.

There are unadopted roads in many constituencies. In some parts of the world, certain people are elected on the issue of potholes in roads. Perhaps the Minister could have a wee look at unadopted roads and consider a campaign so that at least some unadopted roads are brought up to standard. That would get rid of a bugbear for many people in Northern Ireland.

It is good to have trimming in Government Departments. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) talked about trimming, but we need trimming in the Department of Social Security. Staff who are properly trained in interviewing techniques would get better results. One great bugbear is telephone answering in Government Departments, particularly the DSS and the Housing Executive. I should like to think that a little training in telephone answering went on in both Departments.

As a member of the Select Committee on Social Services, I am aware that there are many problems with the social fund. I agree with the points made by other hon. Members about the position of those who are poor for whatever reason—they may have been made redundant or they may never have been able to find a job—and who are in receipt of benefit. If a benefit claimant's cooker breaks down and he or she does not have the money to buy a new one—and cannot, therefore, cook a meal for the children—the DSS cannot make such a person a grant, but can

only offer a loan. That state of affairs is causing great problems. I am sure that we shall have to reconsider it when the new rates come into effect in the autumn but, until then, I shall sit down to allow some of my colleagues to make their points.

9.10 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): This is an almost unique parliamentary occasion and, as can be seen from the crowded Benches, it is of great interest to hon. Members from outside Northern Ireland who flood into the Chamber to hear the constituency problems of hon. Members who represent the Province. None the less, it is an opportunity that we do not like to miss, and we offer no apology for raising the matters that we do. If they seem trivial to some people within the precincts of the House, all that we can say is that the Government provide us with no other opportunity to represent the people of Northern Ireland on these important issues. If the government of Northern Ireland was ordered differently, we might have greater opportunities for dealing with these vital matters either upstairs in Committee or elsewhere.

To get him into the right mood, I should like first to offer my thanks to the Minister for the efforts that I understand he has been making in relation to an important scheme in my constituency which is competing with the Department of Economic Development's local enterprise scheme for a piece of land in the Severn street area of east Belfast.

For many years, the land has been earmarked for the Connswater housing association and is much needed for local housing. Unfortunately, another body for which the Minister also has responsibility within the DED has had its eyes on the site. The two were in some conflict over the land and, before I met the Minister, it appeared that the more mobile of the two would be the winner. Having met the Minister on this issue, I understand that he has now taken some measures withing the Department and that it now looks as if things are moving in the right direction. I hope that those words will encourage him to continue his efforts to ensure that that land comes back into the ownership of the Connswater housing association, so that houses can be built for local people.

I refer the Minister now to road services. I do not know whether he was in Northern Ireland earlier today and whether he has had access to this evening's *Belfast Telegraph*. If he has had the opportunity to see that paper, he will have seen on the front page and in living colour a photograph of some of my constituents, who appear relaxed despite a traumatic past few days. They are residents of the Shannon Park area who, through chit-chat and tittle-tattle at a golf club, discovered that their houses were to be demolished. It appears that the Minister's information service requires us all to take out membership of the local golf clubs so that we can find out what is going to happen in our areas.

Those local residents discovered at a barbecue at a local golf club that the Department of the Environment had changed its proposals for widening the road along the Knock dual carriageway and proposed to create a new intersection which would take away two fine properties and the gardens of other properties. It would displace peole who have fond memories of the houses in which they reside and who can see alternatives to the Department's proposals. For the life of them, they cannot imagine why the Department has not either considered or accepted those alternatives.

The proposals have caused such anxiety in the local area that every political party which has elected representatives in that part of east Belfast has offered its support to the campaign of the local residents. Members of the local council and I contacted the DOE. We have had some response from the Minister's office. It did not go much further than an apology that the matter leaked out. I am glad that the matter leaked out, because it gave people an opportunity to get their armour on and prepare themselves for the battle.

I want the Minister to give me some details about the new phase of the road development. Why was it found necessary to change the proposal at this late stage when houses along the Knock dual carriageway had already been vested? Many houses had already been knocked down, and the road scheme was due to start soon. Why at this late stage was it necessary to have a further scheme which will affect, indeed decimate, the local area?

What alternative proposals were considered by the Department? Why did not the Department properly consult people in the local area and their elected representatives? Why does the Minister use the golf club to disseminate information in the east Belfast community? Perhaps he could also tell me how much the new scheme —*[Interruption.]* The Minister says that he did not use the golf club. I am sure that he will not deny his responsibility for the actions of his Department. I am sure that he will own up and take full responsibility for what goes on within the DOE road services.

Will there be a planning application for the scheme? Will the Minister allow a public inquiry to be held on the foot of the planning application, if there is one? Will he then apply for a vesting order? Will he allow us to have a public inquiry on the foot of the vesting order? If he allows us to have all those things, how will that affect the timing of the rest of the scheme and the finances of the scheme?

I certainly wish to register my outrage at the means by which people were informed of the scheme and to express my support for those who are campaigning for an alternative to be adopted which would require the slip road to go in a direction other than the one that the Department has chosen. We understand from a telephone conversation that the Department is not prepared to accept that proposal, because it might take a few feet from the scrubland attached to the golf course at which the Minister disseminates information to the local community. Perhaps the Minister could have less association with the golf course and more with the people in the area and sort out the problem for the local residents.

The Department of the Environment has responsibility for housing. I have mentioned grants for improvement of dwellings on previous occasions. Many of my constituents have come to me in the past few months because they were appalled at the delays in processing improvement grants. One should recognise that those grants are given only because of the serious need for improvements to be carried out to the housing stock. However, finance has been so restricted in Northern Ireland that only the worst cases are given approval.

The delays are such that, by the time the Department gets round to giving approval, the building estimates that were received from local contractors when the process began are no longer valid. By and large, those considerable

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

cost increases must be met by the owner of the dwelling. Surely the Minister is capable of encouraging the Housing Executive to adopt a more speedy process, so that people in need of those grants are given them, and the work is done at the price estimated at the time of application.

I want to raise another issue, but the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is not in his seat at the moment. Therefore, I shall just keep on talking until the hon. Gentleman comes back. I hope that he has not gone for too long, but in the meantime I shall deal with another issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member may keep on talking so long as he keeps in order.

Mr. Robinson: I always keep in order, but I hope that the Minister will return to his place soon to ensure that I do so tonight.

The Minister of State, who is present now, has considerable knowledge of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland although he does not have direct responsibility for it outside this House. On the previous occasion that we discussed the appropriation order, I raised the issue of the parents and children in the Clarawood estate in my constituency, who have had their school taken away from them. As a result of that decision, the schoolchildren have had to be sent to the Orangefield primary school. As the crow flies, that school is a short distance from the estate, but it is a long distance by road.

When I raised this matter before I was assured that it could be appropriately dealt with by the Belfast education and library board. The board has since considered that matter and it agrees with me that a bus should be laid on to take the children to the school. However, the Department of Education then stepped in and refused to give the necessary permission.

It is a little odd that the Minister, having washed his hands of the issue and having told me to address my complaints to the education and library board, should then step in to stop the provision of the bus. According to a minute from the education and library board, the Department responded to its request by saying:

"it is unable to justify a departure from the general terms of paragraph 2 of the School Transport Circular 1978/49 which states that 'A Board should not normally supply transport or pay travelling expenses for any pupil, other than a handicapped pupil, who lives within statutory walking distance of the school attended.'"

The board's decision however, is not contrary to the provisions of the 1978 circular, as they allow discretion by saying that a board "should not normally" provide transport. Those provisions clearly permit the Department to allow the transport of schoolchildren in special circumstances. Those special circumstances have arisen in the case of Clarawood—they are so special that the appointed board set up to consider the matter approved of the provision of transport for those children. Unfortunately, the Department overruled that decision. What is the point of having education and library boards if the Minister allows his Department to step in to ensure that the thin veneer of local accountability is removed from the system?

The Department is Scrooge-like when providing for attendance allowances. It is clear to elected representatives in Northern Ireland that the number of people who receive attendance allowance depends entirely on the annual allocation. It depends not on how many people need it but on how much finance is available. The Department is refusing some of the most needy cases simply because the finance is not available to meet the need.

That has led to much hardship for those who attempt to keep relatives who require care. If they do not receive that care within the household, they will end up in hospital or residential accommodation, which will cost the Department—albeit under a different head of expenditure—a great deal more. Will the Minister reconsider that false economy and make money available for attendance allowances? It could save his Department money in the long run if people did not have to be institutionalised.

During this debate, several hon. Members have spoken of their concern, which I share, about the cuts in the Department's budget for the area of management that covers the Ulster, Bangor and Ards hospitals. I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) for inviting me to join him at a meeting with the chief administrator of that area, so that we could question him about those cuts. There seems to be an economic domino theory at work. The Tory Government cut the money, the boards must then cut the budgets of the unit areas, and the unit administrators must also cut back. Ultimately, those who suffer are the people who need the service.

The figures that we have seen show that the local area has been asked to try to effect savings of some £1 million, although a smaller saving may be required. They show that severe hardship would be experienced in geriatric and paediatric care. The budgets in those areas have been trimmed to such an extent that further cuts would seriously affect the local service. Indeed, the cut comes on top of a cut the previous year, when 100 beds were cut from that unit of management. A further cut would have an equivalent financial effect. Moreover, the inflation rate will not be met by the figures allocated by the board.

Hon. Members will forgive me if I make comparisons that draw attention to their areas, but we all have to fight our own corners. The area that contains the city hospital is allocated an expenditure of some £60 million, but the cut will be exactly the same as for this unit of management, where the expenditure is only £30 million. It is most unfair that the percentage cut is so much greater in the management unit area.

Mr. Kilfedder: My hon. Friend realises that the tower block at Ulster hospital has drawn away millions of pounds from the North Down district. He mentioned a figure of £60 million. I believe that the figure is about £70 million. Perhaps the Minister will tell us tonight the total cost of building the tower block, the total cost of the equipment and re-equipment of the tower block and the total cost of the tower block's annual management.

I have been critical of the amount of money spent on the tower block both tonight and over the years, but my criticism is limited to that money being spent wastefully. I support the doctors who work in the City hospital, some of whom I know. I have the utmost admiration for the doctors, nurses and ancillary staff, but the people of North Down expect fair play and even-handedness.

Mr. Robinson: I suspect that my hon. Friend may not get those figures from the Minister this evening. If he does, I should be pleased if he would send me a copy of the reply,

because, it was estimated at an early stage that the City hospital tower block would cost £8·4 million; it was then discovered that it would cost more than £43 million, and at that time the work was not even complete. It will be interesting to know what the final figure was for building the tower block, and for furnishing it.

The extent of the inequality suffered by those in that sphere of management is such that, while they serve a significant proportion of the population of the Eastern health and social services board, they have a relatively insignificant proportion of the funds from that board. I should have thought that there should have been a further spread of money across that sector. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the City hospital. Some of us are keeping a close eye on the expenditure within the Royal Victoria hospital and the wisdom of continuing to plough money into that hospital when some of the other hospitals might be better built up to cater for the whole of the community, not just part of it.

Some months ago, together with some of my colleagues, I met the Minister of State, who has direct responsibility at the Department of Finance and Personnel, to discuss a rating issue. The matter under discussion resulted from the receipt of a bill by Castlereagh borough council for recreation facilities for which the Department had not normally charged the council for rating purposes. As a result of the council receiving that bill, which was for more than a quarter of a million, our interest was raised as to why a council should be asked to pay for a service that it was providing.

I understand that the Minister is considering the matter. When we spoke to him, he was prepared to look at the proposition to see whether, as a general rule, a waiver should be provided on rates bills for all local authorities. A bill of a quarter of a million pounds accumulated over a period is a significant amount for a relatively small district council, but does not have the same impact, in proportional terms, on the funding of the Department.

Will the Minister attempt to draw together the pieces of his investigation? He may have some good news for local authorities in Northern Ireland. I have noticed that several other councils are now being touched up by the Department on the same basis and may well have to fork out large sums.

I find it difficult to accept the Department's reasoning. The councils are providing a much-needed service for their ratepayers. They have been doing so for the past five years without receiving the usual 75 per cent. capital expenditure grant from the Department. The facility that the Minister was asked to consider received no grants from the Department; it was built directly from the rates. It seems hard not only to fail to receive the grants that other councils have received but to have to pay rates to the Department on top of that.

I regret that the Minister responsible for the Department of the Environment has not returned to the Chamber. He was present at a social occasion last Saturday evening in Belfast city council. I detected that he was impressed by the speech given by the honoured guest at the installation of the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Nigel Dodds. His guest speaker was Miss Monica Wilson, assistant director of the Northern Ireland Council for the Disabled. She sincerely and thoroughly articulated the difficulties faced by disabled people in Northern Ireland. She spoke of a need for a change of attitude towards the disabled on the part of the Government. A number of the issues that she raised had a direct bearing on the Minister's responsibility—they related to building control and planning.

I would be keen to hear the Minister's response to Miss Wilson's speech. He joined in her standing ovation at the dinner, and seemed genuinely pleased with her comments. It would be useful if he used this occasion to respond to her remarks and to tell us that his consciousness of issues to do with disabled people has been heightened. I hope that changes will occur in his Department to help the disabled people of Northern Ireland.

9.37 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): This has been a wide-ranging debate, as these debates invariably are. Due to the nature of the subject matter and the way in which the government of Northern Ireland is structured, much of it has been a local government debate. I recall that we had a wide-ranging debate a few weeks ago on the occasion of the renewal of direct rule. I suggested then that it might be better—instead of holding these long, unfocused and wide-ranging debates—to consider structuring debates so that we could debate specific subjects. Incidentally, I was interested to hear the comment by the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) to the effect that we need a Northern Ireland Select Committee in which to raise many of these matters. We could also consider discussing some of them in the Northern Ireland Committee, if its format could be made somewhat less restrictive.

In the week in which the House has established a Select Committee to consider our proceedings, our sittings and the way in which our business is handled, it is clearly long overdue that we should examine the handling of Northern Ireland business and put it on a more sensible footing. It is not right to shrug the matter off by allowing Northern Ireland Members two or three nights a year in which to speak on anything they like—that does not provide a satisfactory debate.

Hon. Members have spoken about the Northern Ireland economy, and some expressed false optimism by saying that the Province had missed the recession or was not being affected to the same extent as other parts of the United Kingdom. That is false because the Northern Ireland economy did not fully recover from the first depression in the early lifetime of the present Administration. It had only started to recover when the second recession occurred. It has been said that output has not gone down, but it never recovered to its former level. Other economic problems may arise.

Textiles are an important part of Northern Ireland industry. Some textile firms import cheap yarn from third-world countries and use it to produce high quality goods. I understand that the European Community has recently proposed that anti-dumping duties should be put into effect immediately against imports of cotton, polycotton and polyester yarns from Brazil, Egypt, India, Thailand, Turkey, Taiwan, Indonesia and China. Northern Ireland imports yarn from some of those countries for further processing.

Action against the import of finished garments and fabric from low-cost producer countries would be much more effective. At least cheap yarn enables Northern Ireland to maintain a manufacturing base, whereas finished fabric from abroad is a serious threat to the textile

[Mr. David Trimble]

industry. I hope that the Northern Ireland Office will make representations to the EC about this matter so that Northern Ireland industry can be better protected.

Some hon. Members spoke about urban development grant and the fact that it has not been fairly spread in Northern Ireland. Part of that grant comes from the international fund which has a bias towards certain areas, particularly those that are defined as border areas. Urban development grant in the main cities of Londonderry and Belfast comes directly from the Department. All the towns and villages in eastern and central Ulster, many of which are depressed, are left out. There is one such town in my constituency, the town of Gilford, and in the past 18 months a major employer there has closed. As a result, the town is depressed to some extent and urgently needs some attention, although it is not receiving any from the Department. I hope that that will be remedied.

I regret that the Minister with responsibility for water and sewerage is not in his place, because he is familiar with the problem of Kinnego bay in Lough Neagh where there is serious pollution. The problem comes from the sewage plant at Bulay's hill which discharges into the bay. Because of the location of the discharge point, the shape of the bay and the position of the breakwater, sewage cannot escape from the bay and poses a serious threat to health. Water contact sports have had to be discouraged, even though there has been substantial investment in a marina and the area contains a caravan park and a nature reserve.

The solution is either to move the sewage works from Bulay's hill and put it somewhere else or to place the discharge further into the lough so that sewage does not remain in the bay. The Minister has been fully aware of the problem for some time and knows about the effect on the area. I hope that something can be done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) spoke about the serious problem of unadopted roads. In my constituency there are problems on the road adjoining the railway station site at Laurencetown and at Hayes park, Seapatrick. There is a particular problem in Laws lane off the Castlewellan road, Banbridge. The road is in a very bad condition. There are only five households directly on the road, although there is a small terrace off the road also served by it, with more households. A local college of further education also uses property there. The fact that it is an unadopted road in poor condition is helping to sterilise what might otherwise be useful development land.

Laws lane presents a problem slightly different from that posed by other unadopted roads. Many years ago, there was litigation on the matter, and in 1963 a compromise was reached on terms that led local residents to believe that they had been absolved from any future liability to maintain the road. Some local residents argue that the terms of the settlement, or the implications of those terms, meant that the then council accepted an obligation to maintain the road. If that was the case, the obligation would have been transferred from the old Banbridge council to the Department when other road functions were transferred from councils to the Department in 1973.

I am glad to see that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), has returned to the Chamber, because he will remember the Laws lane case. It was raised at the Northern Ireland Assembly, and a suggestion was made that the position should be examined, and legislation on unadopted roads introduced. I understand that the Minister is planning to introduce legislation on private streets next year, and I urge him to take the opportunity to include in it provisions on unadopted roads.

There is a general problem throughout the Province. The last time the possibility of bringing Laws lane up to standard to be adopted was considered, the cost was estimated at more than £200,000. The handful of residents in Laws lane could never afford that. There is a clear case for public money to be used, or for some other provision to be made. Next year's legislation will provide the opportunity to clear up the issue.

I am sorry to say that all the health matters that I wish to raise relate to the Southern health and social services board, which is not covering itself with glory in Upper Bann. Most of the problems seem to be focused in the town of Banbridge. We have the problem of the day centre —or, at least, the problem is that we do not have the day centre any more.

A month or two ago, there was a serious bomb incident in the town and a number of public buildings were affected. Most were quickly brought back into service, but the board has used the incident as an excuse to close the day centre. It was open after the incident, but a few days later it was closed and has not been reopened. People who used to attend it now have to go to Portadown, where they feel that the provision is less suitable than was the case in Banbridge. The board has given no clear explanation of the position with regard to the day centre, and has not said when it will be reopened. Clearly the situation is unsatisfactory.

The position of the Spelga house element of Banbridge hospital is unsatisfactory, too. I have had occasion to refer to the matter before in the House, and things are not getting any better. Spelga house is an old block providing continuing care for the elderly. It is reasonable for its use to be discontinued, and the board took a decision in principle to dispose of it some years ago. The problem is the provision of an alternative.

Local people were given to understand that, on the closure of Spelga house, its occupants would be accommodated elsewhere on the site of the Banbridge hospital. At a recent board meeting, the unit manager said:

"there was an understanding . . . every effort would be made to ensure that alternative services were local and accessible . . . alternative provision would have been made in Banbridge. Whilst not stated it was inferred".

It was more than inferred. The Rev. Roger Purse, a minister in Loughbrickland and Scarva, who was the spokesman for a delegation representing all the clergy of the area at that meeting of the board, said:

"Patients were aware of the initial decision to close Spelga House, but guarantees were given again and again that they would not be moved off the Banbridge hospital site."

Mr. Purse continued:

"The Chairman of the former board, at a meeting I attended on 8 March 1989, stated that, with the planned closure of Spelga House the 30 patients would be relocated within the main hospital."

Instead, on 11 June, the new board apparently took a decision in principle to run down the number of people in Spelga, to move the remainder to Lurgan during the refurbishment of the main Banbridge site and then, 15 or 20 months later, to move them back to Banbridge.

That is not acceptable. There is a need for continuing care in the locality. Lurgan is some distance away and there is inadequate transport, particularly public transport, to it. There is also the question of the risk to the old people of the move from Spelga to Lurgan. In similar cases in England and Wales there has been significant attrition where people have been relocated. The new board will have to consider that carefully and not be too casual in running risks with people's health in the move to Lurgan.

The solution is obvious: it is to leave the patients in Spelga house until the refurbishment of the main site is complete and then to move them on to the main site. If that were done, the problem would not arise. People were given to understand that that would happen, and it should still happen.

We also have a problem with the casualty unit at Banbridge hospital, which has been in difficulties for some time. It has been run on a half-day basis because of the shortage of junior consultants. Constant representations have been made to the board about it and, until recently, the board said that it was trying to recruit junior medical staff to cover casualty at Banbridge.

On 21 June, the clerk of a committee of Banbridge district council telephoned the unit general manager at approximately 2 pm simply to inquire what the current position was. The clerk was told by the unit general manager that interviews for junior medical staff were taking place and that an appointment would be made soon. Less than half an hour later, Banbridge council received a telex from the unit general manager saying that casualty was closing immediately. Someone made the decision to close the unit; it was obviously not the unit general manager. It is a terrible way to administer a service to be telling people at 2 pm that the recruitment of junior medical staff to run casualty is going ahead and then to close down casualty completely.

When the council queried the closure of casualty, it was told that an additional reason for the closure was the proposed refurbishment of the main site, which would make it difficult to run the casualty service. That inevitably gives rise to the question of what other facilities will be affected by the refurbishment because other parts of the hospital, too, should continue in operation throughout the refurbishment period.

We feel that many of these problems can be placed at the door of the new boards that have been established. I have to tell the Minister that, so far, our experience of the new boards has not been particularly satisfactory. We queried the basis of their creation and the absence of a representative element. People have noticed, however, that there seems to be a certain geographical spread in relation to the persons serving on the boards. Not unnaturally, noticing that a person resident in the Banbridge district had been appointed to the board, Banbridge council sought a meeting with that person, only to be told, in a reply from the chairman of the board, that members of the board would not be meeting district councils.

We know that there is now no representative element in the administration of the health services but it is most unsatisfactory for board members to be instructed by their chairman not to meet local councillors to hear their views. It is not good enough to say that consultative councils will sit in parallel with the board. If board members are obstructive, that in itself is unsatisfactory. [HON. MEMBERS: "Is that a general ruling?"] I do not know—perhaps the Minister will tell us when he replies.

I should have liked to raise other matters, but some of my colleagues have been in the Chamber since the beginning of the debate and they are anxious to speak. I shall conclude, and give them the opportunity to do so.

9.55 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I wish to direct my remarks to the vote covering the Departments of Economic Development, the Environment, Education, and Health and Social Services. I shall try not to take up all the time available, as I know that other hon. Members are waiting patiently for the opportunity to speak.

Of the 3,100 jobs lost in Northern Ireland recently, a disproportionately high number have been in my constituency. While I welcome the announcement today of another 500 jobs for Belfast, and support a fair distribution among able-bodied and disabled people, those jobs are not readily accessible to many of my constituents. We urgently need a major employer to locate in our area. The town of Larne expanded rapidly with the development of BTH, which later became GEC, and then GEC Alsthom. The seriousness of the 500 recently announced job losses can be appreciated and put into perspective only when it is understood that the former work force at that plant was three times that number. It has steadily reduced over the years.

Job opportunities that would absorb 500 employees are not readily available in the area, so it is vital that new resources are found from the ecomomic development budget, and directed towards east Antrim. The local economy has suffered terribly, with the closure of ICI, Courtaulds, Clingers Yarns and Carreras, with constant job losses in other manufacturing industries. Northern Telecom, formerly Standard Telephones and Cables, is a vital part of the community in Newtownabbey, but there have been redundancies in recent years, and now the company has announced a further 205 job losses. Forced redundancies begin this month, and will run until the end of the year.

There is a thriving retail trade in Newtownabbey, but many of those who use the shopping facilities come from outside the area. That disguises the genuine hardship that has resulted from high levels of unemployment in east Newtownabbey and, in particular, in the huge estates in that area. In addition to the 205 redundancies, a further 350 temporary workers at Northern Telecom were laid off earlier this year. East Antrim cannot sustain that level of job losses.

Following the announcement of the redundancies, the Under-Secretary was reported in the local press as having said that Northern Telecom would continue to play a vital role in the area. That is welcome, but it is not much consolation for those who have been made redundant, their families, or the local businesses that will undoubtedly suffer.

A number of shops in Larne have already closed, and traders badly need a confidence boost. Indeed, the whole community needs a morale boost, which only a new major industry can provide. The area has a fine tradition of hard work. The skills are available but the local work force is not being given the opportunity to demonstrate just what it can do. A special effort must be made.

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

I appreciate the efforts and support of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), recently when the employees of Circaprint made a special effort to protect and defend the jobs that were about to be lost there. Sadly, most of the major industries that have been set up in the past 30 years have now gone, but the skills which were learned are still there. We need a commitment to revitalise industry in east Antrim.

It seems a long time to go back, but my first employment was at the then BTH plant in 1957. The Duke of Gloucester said that the project was an example of faith in industrial development in Ulster. At the opening ceremony, the factory manager proposed a toast to the Northern Ireland Government, saying that he was happy to be able to regard the Government as a friend, always willing, ready and able to help. I hope that, before too long, I can pay the same tribute to the Minister.

The then Prime Minister said that the Northern Ireland Office was always eager to extend all possible help to new industry. That was the legacy of the Stormont Administration, always willing and able to help new industry. The Stormont Administration did much to bring inward investment to the Province and to east Antrim. My constituency was a prime beneficiary of their forward-looking policies. The Ulster Unionist Government worked hard to attract investment in Northern Ireland and had a clear policy on how to achieve that end. Promoting the Province was not superficial; it was not a shop window competition. Before promoting the Province to potential investors, the Stormont Administration made sure that conditions for investors in industry in Ulster were at the level necessary for large-scale manufacturing industry.

Under the Ulster Unionist Government, the transport network in Northern Ireland was greatly improved, and an electricity service of the highest standard was developed. All that was achieved in co-operation with the Westminster Government. Sadly, little has been done since direct rule and our loss of the Stormont Administration.

East Antrim has now lost most of its larger employers. Resources must again be made available to promote the area and to attract investment there. Such resources have already been made available to west Belfast and Londonderry. East Antrim is a neighbour of Belfast, on the eastern seaboard. It has the second busiest port in the United Kingdom, and it accommodates two of Northern Ireland's four power generating stations. Yet, as a result of the loss of much of its manufacturing sector, it urgently needs the same level of resources and commitment to the unemployed as have already been given to west Belfast and Londonderry.

The people of east Antrim have taken a lead in generating business confidence against all the odds, and the people locally—trade unionists, educationists, public representatives and the business community—plan to revitalise the town's industrial sector. They have the co-operation of the local council, despite its limited powers, but they need the co-operation of Government to succeed in their objectives. I ask the Minister tonight for that commitment and support and whether he has yet had any success in promoting interest in the huge GEC-Alsthom complex where nearly 2,000 people were once employed.

We need to invest in further training provision in east Antrim as a whole and in Larne in particular. The area has a tradition of skilled and willing workers, good industrial relations and excellent education facilities. Excellent training was provided for years by GEC. Many of the people trained there were either head hunted or poached by smaller employers who did not involve themselves in training. Newtownabbey has a Government training centre.

Larne and Carrickfergus need the same provision as has been made available at Newtownabbey and at the Government training centre in Ballymena. In view of the difficulties that have arisen from the closure of GEC, will the Minister consider as a priority providing Government support for a training centre in Larne? The younger generation must be given the opportunity to learn the skills that their elders learned in the factories of east Antrim. They need more than a youth training programme job in a bakery or shoe shop.

When he takes into account our serious job losses, will the Minister provide guidance to his planning service on the need for flexibility and common sense? There must be a sensible relaxation of the rules concerning land that is zoned as special or of outstanding natural beauty. For example, there is the prospect of developing a small hotel-leisure facility at Ballycarry in east Antrim. That would create 30 to 40 jobs. We desperately need any jobs. We must have assistance if we are to attract jobs to the area. The project has the support of the local council.

There is no reason why, therefore, common sense should not prevail. The project could be constrained by means of the enforcement of planning conditions, thereby ensuring that it fits neatly into the area for which it is designed. That would meet local needs and provide employment opportunities. At the same time, it would satisfy the planning conditions. If they were not complied with, I should support their enforcement.

As for money voted to the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland, I draw attention to the importance of Larne harbour to the Northern Ireland economy and also to the importance of the Larne-Belfast road to the Province as a whole. Larne is the second busiest port in the United Kingdom. It is at one end of the Larne-Stranraer corridor. It is the shortest sea crossing between Northern Ireland and the mainland. The successful development of Larne harbour, through private initiative and with European Community grant aid, deserves the whole-hearted protection that Northern Ireland Office Ministers and Her Majesty's Government can give. It must be defended and supported so that what has been achieved can be protected against the designs of the Irish Republic, which wishes to redirect passenger and freight traffic along the Dublin-Holyhead route.

It would be an absolute disgrace if public money were to be used to duplicate what has already been provided, through EC funding, and to destroy the local initiative that has already been established there. I hope that, as a demonstration of good faith the Larne-Stranraer corridor is given at least equal status, as a Euro-route, from the island of Ireland and that there will be a clear announcement by the Minister that money will be made available to upgrade the Larne-Belfast road. it would be

most satisfying if we also heard from him that an application had already been submitted to the European Community for the requisite funding for this project.

There is a black spot on the Antrim coast road in my constituency, which is, of course, one of the most beautiful in the British Isles. That black spot is an old limestone whiting mill. One knows when one is approaching the area half a mile before reaching it because every house, shop and church in the village is affected by limestone dust. The village needs more than a mere face lift—it needs a commitment from the Department of the Environment and support from the Department of Economic Development to ensure that the money spent on the Glenarm village study was not wasted and that the report was not another merely to be pigeonholed and forgotten.

The village community would like a commitment for funding to relocate the old whiting mill from the coast road inland. I understand that the Eglinton limestone company is prepared to make a substantial financial contribution to help the village meet its long-term objective, but that Government intervention and support would be necessary to make it a possibility. I hope that that matter will be dealt with at an early date. As the local community would be the main beneficiary of a move inland by the limestone company, the use of public funding to encourage the company to make that move would be well justified.

I also appeal on behalf of the tenants of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Nos. 1 to 8 in Roscor square in Rathcoole. I support the tenants in their wish to remain in their homes. They have taken pride in them and they have a secure mini-community. The houses should not be demolished; they should be refurbished and improved as has happened elsewhere. I hope that the Minister will be able to advise the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that tenants' wishes should be given priority over those of the people who wish to promote landscaping and redevelopment schemes, however attractive and desirable they may be.

A report has been published about discrimination in funding in Northern Ireland. Wild allegations have been made, but I have not yet had the opportunity to digest the report fully. I take this opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the statistics published in *Hansard* of 29 April on expenditure per pupil in England on books and equipment, and the statistics published in *Hansard* of 30 April at column *131* referring to expenditure on books and equipment in primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland.

Those statistics—regardless of whether schools are Protestant or Roman Catholic—show that expenditure in Northern Ireland on primary and secondary school pupils since 1978-79 has been to the disadvantage of Northern Ireland primary school pupils. Expenditure was approximately £10 less per primary pupil in Northern Ireland than in England. In 1988-89, that disadvantage had been reduced to £4·40 per pupil. However, the real gap in funding for pupils in secondary schools in Northern Ireland in 1988-89 compared with those in secondary schools in England shows a disadvantage of approximately £20 a pupil.

In both our primary and secondary schools, all our children have been losing out. If my interpretation of the figures contained in *Hansard* on those two dates is inaccurate, I wish to be so advised. Although some movement has been made to bridge the gap, in 1989-90, according to the statistics available, much more must be done.

How can the Secretary of State justify discrimination against Northern Ireland pupils? Funding has been the same in Protestant and in Roman Catholic schools, but at a lower level than that provided in England. I want an assurance that all school pupils in Northern Ireland will be treated fairly and equally, and that funding will be provided at the same rate as for comparable children in schools in England. I also want to know what steps can be taken to make up for the shortfall in funding over all those years for books and equipment in Northern Ireland schools.

I must again refer to the funding under the order for health and social services. My constituents in the Larne-Carrickfergus area would never forgive me if I failed to appeal again to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who is responsible for health, and to the Secretary of State to consider further the case presented by Carrickfergus and Larne borough councils and by the Moyle action committee for the retention of acute hospital facilities at the Moyle hospital in Larne. I record my thanks to the Minister in his absence for his usual courtesy in informing me in advance of his visit to the Moyle hospital last week. It was not possible for me to meet him on that occasion, because I was representing the borough council at the 75th anniversary of the battle of the Somme in France.

I would also like the Minister to know that we in Larne, the councils in Carrickfergus and Larne and the Moyle action committee will avail ourselves of the opportunity to meet him formally and to discuss our problems in the very near future. Limited expenditure on Moyle hospital now would upgrade it and provide accessibility to acute hospital provision for the isolated coastal area equal to that provided for patients elsewhere in Northern Ireland. Such upgrading should happen before any commitment is given to proceed with phase 2 of the new Antrim hospital project. The vast majority of general practitioners in east Antrim and the overwhelming majority of the population are unconvinced by the arguments of the northern health board in favour of the new Antrim hospital. I again appeal for an independent option appraisal on the future of the Moyle hospital before any services are removed.

10.18 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words, especially as I realise that there is at least one other hon. Member who wishes to speak, and I know that the Minister will need as much time as possible to wind up. I am sure that the Minister is aware of the problem of the flooding in north Belfast last weekend. That brings me to a subject of great concern—the fact that the gullies did not seem to be able to take the heavy rain that fell last weekend, as has happened on other occasions. What concerns me more is the fact that the Department of the Environment does not accept any responsibility for the damage caused to houses as a result of the flood. In the circumstances, the Department should be far more sympathetic to claims.

I know of widows who are on very limited incomes and cannot afford to take the Department to court. They

[Mr. A. Cecil Walker]

depend on what the Department can do to honour its obligations as a result of the flooding. I hope that the Minister will consider that aspect with a view to trying to help those unfortunate people who are suffering as a result of the flooding which frequently happens in Northern Ireland, particularly in north Belfast, because water does not quickly run off the hills.

I have with me a news release from the Housing Executive which states that a survey of 11,000 dwellings in Northern Ireland is to be carried out by the Housing Executive and that earlier surveys carried out in 1974, 1979, 1984 and 1987 have provided valuable information. I do not know where the Housing Executive conducted its survey, but it cannot have surveyed north Belfast to any great extent, particularly the Shankill road, where vast areas of ground are lying derelict and countless numbers of people, particularly the elderly, are looking for decent accommodation and cannot get it. Every week, perhaps 20 or 30 people from that area look for housing but cannot find it.

I cordially invite the Minister to come with me to view the Shankill road and see the problem for himself. The Housing Executive is dragging its feet. Prime land which is suitable for elderly people's accommodation—it is close to shops and all amenities—is not being developed. Some of it has been offered to the private sector. As I understand it, there is no great interest in it. Some of it will be turned into playing fields, and so on. That is completely wrong and it is opposed root and branch by the people of the area. I congratulate the Minister on his service to Northern Ireland. He is the longest-serving Minister in the Province—long may it continue.

Although I have much sympathy for the homeless, in some situations there is exploitation. The Housing Executive, in its desire to house an many homeless people as possible, is not properly examining the real facts. It is giving houses to supposedly homeless people who are making themselves homeless. Houses are being used for what we now know are giro drops. We find that it will take the Housing Executive more than a year to go through the process of trying to remove so-called homeless people from houses that they are not even inhabiting.

I now refer to solid fuel fires. Many glass-fronted room heaters have run their course and are causing great trouble. They are emitting fumes and causing problems for the elderly. Many elderly people are now opposed to them. I hope that the Minister will now consider providing a more acceptable form of heating. Economy 7 is now widely demanded by the elderly. Some would much prefer an open solid fuel fire which they can control. Elderly people have great difficulty in moving the ash pans on glass-fronted heaters and, as a result, are sometimes injured in the process.

My hon. Friends the Members for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) and for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) referred to unadopted roads. I should like to refer to unadopted entries, of which there are innumerable examples in north Belfast. It is unfair that residents should have to maintain such entries and that services are not provided. The Government should now decide that all entries should be adopted and be brought up to a decent standard of repair. That is necessary, because there is a problem with people falling into them, especially the elderly. We should examine that issue carefully and as soon as possible.

I am sure that we all remember our nursery rhymes from school and learning about simple Simon meeting the pieman when going to the fair and about four and twenty blackbirds being baked in a pie. That brings me to my next subject. I refer to the draconian public health measures. Quite a number of people in north Belfast follow the tradition of pie-making, of which there is a great tradition throughout the United Kingdom.

Those poor people in my constituency, who have been making pies for generations without any problems and have exported them throughout the United Kingdom, are being put out of business because they cannot meet the draconian environmental health provisions. The Government should look at this matter carefully. If they are to insist that those people are put out of business, they should ask the Local Enterprise Development Unit to do something specific and to acquire new premises so that those people can continue their activity of piemaking and protect the jobs that are in danger of being lost.

I said that I did not want to speak for long, and I shall refer only briefly to the privatisation of the health authorities. Many people connected with the health boards are concerned about the benefits that are accruing from the privatisation of the services. They tell me that undue emphasis seems to be placed on administration and that the savings which accrue from the privatisations are not being channeled into medical services or into community health care. I should like the Minister to look into that to see where the savings are being directed.

In conclusion, I congratulate the Minister on the action for community employment schemes in the Province which are doing an imaginative job. The training initiatives are working well. From my experience, I know that more than 50 per cent. of those who have had 12 months' training are now getting jobs. That is an excellent record, and I commend it to the Minister with the thought that perhaps the schemes could be enlarged. Nevertheless, they are doing an excellent job for the young people of the Province.

10.28 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I thank the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) for completing his speech early to allow me time to speak before those on the Front Benches reply.

This is a peculiar appropriation debate. We are used to having only three hours late at night—we do not usually start as early as 4.30 pm—to deal with important matters relating to Northern Ireland, such as agriculture, economic development, the environment, education, health, social services and the like. However today, because of the peculiarities of the timetable and because the Government have run out of business—they are not being generous to Northern Ireland—they are allowing us to enjoy a fuller debate on Northern Ireland issues; there has been an opportunity for a much more wide-ranging debate than usual.

I do not know whether hon. Members have made use of the longer debate to discuss general issues in Northern Ireland, its bread-and-butter problems and the details of

economic and social development. I appreciate that Northern Ireland Members have used the debate as an opportunity to deal with their constituency problems. It is a great chance, and it should be done. However, I sometimes think that that should be put in a different framework, so that general matters of economic and social concern can be raised.

If we get economic and social development right, we help to handle many of the wider problems in Northern Ireland. Some time ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) argued from the Opposition Front Bench that economic and social developments, although important in their own right, had another purpose. They aided peace and security in Northern Ireland. Gloomy job prospects and economic deprivation and all the problems that flow from it were conditions that bred sectarianism. Therefore, a comprehensive economic strategy needed to be developed for Northern Ireland. That has been absent under this Government in the past 12 years.

My hon. Friend said that the top priorities were economic regeneration and partnership between public and private capital, and he stressed Labour's policies on training. In Northern Ireland, the standard of use of the educational system and of qualifications is high. But training appropriate for the jobs that should be created by economic regeneration in modern technological circumstances also needs to be in place. That is part of Labour's programme

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South also stressed the European dimension. He referred to the European structural fund. He said that it should not be hidebound in Northern Ireland by the principle of additionality, under which funds that were available from Europe could not be utilised fruitfully. It is disgraceful that the principle operates generally, but if there is a place where its operation is most disgraceful, it is Northern Ireland. If more funds are needed anywhere to assist economic and social development, it is Northern Ireland. If money is available to do many of the things that have been suggested by Northern Ireland Members tonight, it should be grasped and made use of. There is a case for killing off the principle that the Government are following in Northern Ireland, and it would be of great benefit to do so in the rest of the United Kingdom too.

There is an extra-European dimension. To a large extent, Europe needs democratic institutions, especially through the European Parliament, and a social content. The social charter and the principles that follow from it could nowhere be made use of more beneficially than in Northern Ireland. Some of the advantages that have been lost under this Government's policies in recent years could be brought back by the adoption of the social charter. That is why the Trades Union Congress found some attraction in the social contract, and had a new look at the position in Europe.

The social charter is particularly appropriate to Northern Ireland, where European provisions have often operated to make grants and moneys available. It might not have qualified for such grants under the criteria, but it qualified to some extent, because the European Community realised the problems that existed there. In the past 12 years, the Government have pushed forward the enterprise culture. That culture is competitive and divisive, and it encouraged a divided society in which there are already two distinct communities. If anything is destined to make things worse, it is an inappropriate response to economic and social problems. The difficulty with the enterprise culture and the principles of Thatcherism is that they operate as though there were universal truths which must apply to all circumstances and conditions. Those truths manifestly did not apply to the conditions in Northern Ireland.

Cuts in direct taxation, and the Government's privatisation policies, are of little relevance to Northern Ireland. The Government are still pushing for the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland when the people, the constitutional political parties and those outside that structure are opposed to it. The trade unions and other organisations also object to the proposal. The reaction to the apparent consensus identified by the Government is disgraceful and should not be accepted.

The Secretary of State has taken steps to try to draw Northern Ireland together, but he has also often had to come to the Dispatch Box to advocate doctrinaire measures in line with Government policy. That action has been foisted upon the right hon. Gentleman as result of Cabinet decisions—and such decisions are still being taken despite the change of Prime Minister.

Where do the politicians of Northern Ireland stand on the broader political principles? We have heard a great deal about their concern for the well-being of certain areas, the Moyle hospital and other issues. We should treat the appropriation debate like the Budget debate, but it is important to know where those politicians stand on the issues other than those that divide the two communities. Often, those issues are not addressed unless they involve the politics of the border.

The broader political issues are often left to one side, because the hon. Members representing Northern Ireland are not involved in forming a Government in the United Kingdom. They would come into play only if they were in the peculiar position of holding the balance of power. If that were to happen, where would they stand on the issues I have outlined? Would they favour a comprehensive economic strategy or an enterprise culture? Would they want the Government's principles to be adhered to? I should like to hear where those hon. Members stand on those issues.

Just as economic and social development aids peace and security, so peace and security aids economic and social development. One must move on both fronts to achieve progress. Many things are happening in Northern Ireland that show that people are prepared to be brave and to stand up for peace. I have mentioned previously organisations such as Families Against Intimidation and Terror, which is run by Nancy Gracy, and the trade union support for the campaign "Hands Off My Mate".

Another important development is the peace train that will travel between Belfast, Dublin and London. That train will use the Holyhead route to London, so I hope that that is not judged ideologically suspect, given some of the comments made tonight. The idea is that the line between Belfast and Dublin should not be disrupted by terrorist threats, as it often has been by the IRA. In the past years, travel on that line has been disrupted in both directions.

Because of the IRA's action to disrupt the rail services in this country and the death that occurred at Victoria, it has been decided that the peace train journey will have a three-way link from Belfast to Dublin, through Holyhead,

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

to Euston. The train will travel from Dublin to Belfast next Thursday and people will then be brought here on the Friday to meet in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons. The attitude that such action symbolises needs wide support, as well as the economic and social measures that I outlined earlier.

Improved economic and social conditions, which undermine the position on which sectarianism stands, seem to go hand in hand with the actions of those who stand for peace and security. They allow trade to take place, and they make economic and social development possible.

10.41 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) for limiting his thoughtful contribution to 10 minutes and allowing me a little time to sum up the debate. As is the custom during debates on the appropriation order, hon. Members have spoken about a wide range of issues that affect their constituencies and the people of Northern Ireland. By the time the Minister has replied to the debate, we shall have debated the order for almost seven hours, which may be a record. Having sat through most of the debate, I pondered long and hard on whether there should be a different forum where many of the issues could be discussed. I do not wish to be controversial at this late hour, but I merely drop that sultana in the pudding of the politics of Northern Ireland. Perhaps hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland on both sides of the Chamber should try to find a different way for such debates to proceed.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a way forward might be a Select Committee, where we could scrutinise the Departments much more closely?

Mr. Stott: No, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's contention.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman is running away from it.

Mr. Stott: I am not running away from anything. I do not want to enter a discussion about that issue. I was simply attempting to suggest that a more appropriate forum to discuss many of those issues could perhaps be found in Northern Ireland. So that the Minister has adequate time to reply, I shall simply leave the hon. Gentleman to ponder that matter.

I wish to concentrate on a serious issue for which I have Opposition responsibility—education. It is now nearly 18 months since the Minister of State introduced his Northern Ireland reform order. Many hon. Members present tonight will remember the debate on it. The proposals had the unique effect of unifying all the hon. Members from the Province against the Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "What do you mean?"] It is a pity that that degree of unanimity and sense of purpose has not been continued in the past few months. However, I shall leave that issue as a second sultana in the pudding for hon. Gentlemen to consider.

During the past 18 months I have visited many schools and colleges in Northern Ireland and had meetings with all the individual trade unions which represent the teaching profession in Northern Ireland. Three weeks ago, I had a meeting in Belfast with the umbrella group of teachers unions that represent the entire teaching force of the Province. All is not well—we have heard that during this evening's debate. There are serious problems in the educational system in Northern Ireland.

Before the Minister accuses me of making party political points, I shall refer him to his own report—that of Her Majesty's inspector of schools, which concluded that one third of Ulster's secondary schools had accommodation deficiencies which adversely affect children's education. The inspectors said that, in one school, to which I think the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) referred, there were 17 temporary classrooms, and pupils were also being taught in corridors and in alcoves. In another school, youngsters had to sit on broken chairs.

The major investigation conducted by Her Majesty's inspectors said that 20 per cent. of post-primary schools had heating systems that were inefficient and/or noisy, and there were problems that could endanger the health and safety of children. One school had inoperative smoke doors and a padlocked exit. In one fifth of the 58 schools formally inspected over the past year, inappropriate or inadequate books were being used in some classes, with pupils occasionally required to share books.

With the education reform now the law of the land, the inspectors say that there is a wide diversity in schools in the timetable allocation for a common curriculum. The only subjects being taken by fourth and fifth form pupils are English, maths, physical education, religious education and careers. The inspectors said that only one quarter of the schools had developed "particular effective" policies of assessment and that many schools had no co-ordinated policy on marking or homework. The report continued:

"The absence of a policy led to a wide divergence in the quality of marking in the majority of schools . . . at times the marking was thorough . . . at other times superficial and on occasions work was left unmarked".

The inspectors confirmed—this is regrettable—an all too depressing trend in Northern Ireland, with low-ability pupils receiving a "raw deal". Those words are not mine, but those of the Government inspectors. Children in Ulster's educational system are receiving a raw deal. They are frequently excluded from important sectors of the curriculum and have inadequate access to other parts of it.

That report is a damning enough indictment in itself, but when added to other reports that have been published—not necessarily by a Government Department, but by other people with a great interest in education—the position seems a great deal worse. A study by the campaign group, the Association for Comprehensive Education in Northern Ireland—ACE—argued that

"declining pupil numbers and the policy of open enrolment will make it impossible to achieve parity of esteem between grammar and other post-primary schools, despite the new common curriculum and assessment system. It is much more likely that the gap between the haves and the have nots will widen and that the welcome idea of a common curriculum will perish."

I welcome the idea of a common curriculum and I have no doubt that the Minister has heard those arguments on many occasions. He may know one of the authors of that report, Mr. Robert Crone, who commented in a document, "The Transfer Market: Selection for Secondary Education in Northern Ireland 1947-1991":

"It is difficult to avoid the feeling that what is said one day by the grammar school lobby becomes Department policy shortly afterwards.

Since the Second World War all the procedures for selection have been biased in favour of the grammar schools, which in effect 'opt out' of the state system.

The Association believes the willingness of Ulster parents to pay fees to secure grammar school places for their children negated the sort of community opposition which resulted in comprehensive education on the mainland.

After more than a decade of serious decline in pupil numbers the voluntary grammar schools have hardly felt any difference. There have been variations, with Belfast the worst sufferer, but clearly the contraction of secondary education has been managed by the sacrifice of controlled and maintained secondary schools in order to preserve the priviliged voluntary grammar schools. The effect of the flaws and fallacies of open enrolment will be the creation of a split system of education—one defined by its exclusive right to

[Mr. Stott]

select pupils by ability, its 'financial resources and independence and its political influence."

Here we find a recurring theme in what has been said about Northern Ireland education:

"On the other hand there is an underprivileged section marked by the meanness of its funding, its responsibility for looking after the casualties of present day society, its lack of resources and political power and the persistence of Government refusal ever to offer more than token support."

The continuation in Northern Ireland of a selective system of secondary education is corrosive and disgraceful. At this moment, many parents are involved in a costly appeal procedure to get their children into schools of their choice. The Government pretend to favour parental choice, but in Northern Ireland they fund and maintain a system of secondary and grammar schools with unequal resources and parental esteem. The selection of children at 11 has taken place in Northern Ireland since 1948 and it is wholly discredited. I oppose a divided and inequitable system of education, funded by public funds.

I was interested to read a question tabled by that well known renegade, the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) asking the Minister to delineate some examination results. Granted, A-level passes in Northern Ireland are superb, principally because there is a selection system. If it did not achieve those results, the system would not be worth the paper it was written on. The written answer to the hon. Gentleman's question went on to say that children leaving Northern Ireland schools without a single qualification make up 16·4 per cent. of the school population.

My children went through the comprehensive education system. I failed the 11-plus. I am on the side of the 16·4 per cent. of kids in Northern Ireland who do not get a decent chance because of selection at 11 and because of the resources put into selective schools. Wherever it comes from, Northern Ireland or Wigan, taxpayers' money should not be used in this way. In the competitive labour market of the future, qualifications will be important. If these kids are to stand a chance of finding jobs, they must leave school with a decent education and some qualifications.

I want to mention local management of schools. The first tranche of locally managed schools in Northern Ireland has caused grave problems in teaching and non-teaching sectors of education. The crisis engendered by the introduction of LMS was so grave that the Government were forced to release an additional £2·7 million to relieve the problem. That clearly shows the real threat of LMS to the education system. The problem has been worsened in Northern Ireland by the absence of an agreed redeployment scheme for teachers and the imposition of cash limits by the Government for funding for premature retirement.

The lack of funding implicit in Northern Ireland's locally managed schools has been accentuated by the total removal of flexibility caused by the overall global budget being broken up into smaller budgets. Schools throughout Northern Ireland are facing problems coping with provision for educational needs and funding the existing teaching staff.

Teachers throughout Northern Ireland face the threat of redundancy, and the threat is not alleviated by the Minister's statement of 24 June when he said that 543 schools, 214 in the maintained sector and 329 in the controlled sector, would have a reduced share of resources.

It is no consolation to schools in Northern Ireland that 689 schools will get additional resources while 543 schools will lose out on their budgets. The net effect is destructive to school life with greater pressures being imposed on teachers and consequent loss of morale. There is an urgent need for the Government to consider removing the teachers' salary element from LMS and injecting monies to make formula funding more workable.

I touched on other aspects of education in Northern Ireland when I spoke in the debate on a Northern Ireland education order. The Minister became angry when I trotted out one or two unfortunate statistics on nursery education, but those statistics remain. In Northern Ireland only 13 per cent. of three and four-year-olds receive nursery education, compared with 25 per cent. in England and Wales and 34 per cent. in Scotland. I suggest to Northern Ireland Members that, to say the least, 13 per cent. is lamentable. They should press the Minister to do more about that.

On special educational needs, one wonders what the Government have been doing about the Education and Library Board Order 1986 which sought to promote special education in Northern Ireland. That order addressed many problems, but they have not been resolved. The Government have made no progress on that.

Hon. Members have spoken about the report just published by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. That report reveals substantial imbalances in expenditure between Catholic and non-Catholic schools. The differential in capital expenditure has always been clear, as Catholic schools are eligible for only 85 per cent. capital funding. In practice, the payments scheme means that the true cost to Catholic schools is over 15 per cent. That could be remedied by a more streamlined procedure in the Northern Ireland Department of Education and the newly established council for Catholic maintained schools.

Mr. William Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stott: No, because I am coming to the end of my speech.

The report of the standing Advisory Commission makes a strong case for reviewing the 85 per cent. capital funding. Although the Catholic Church believes that it should be responsible for some capital funding, the logic of the present breakdown of costs is debatable. The present system is justified in terms of the degree of managerial control preserved by the Church. However, that is undermined by the national curriculum, the reduction in managerial independence and by the decision to give 100 per cent. funding to integrated schools, with which I do not argue.

The major surprise in the report is the discovery that there are substantial imbalances in recurrent spending. The grammar school sector, the state Protestant sector, spent £1,652 per pupil in 1989-90. The equivalent figure for Catholic schools was £1,557—in other words, only 94 per cent. of state school expenditure. The report calls on the DENI to monitor all funding decisions with respect to their impact on such differentials and on the promotion of equality between the two sectors.

Given the implications of educational attainment for status in the labour market, equality of opportunity in education is essential if fair employment policies are to retain their credibility. I am flagging the issue so that the Minister can reply fully to the debate. I am sure that the House will want to know the Government's intentions in regard to the SCHR report. Is there any foundation for the report's conclusions that a sector of Northern Ireland schools has been inadequately funded for a number of years? It has been suggested that the inadequacy in funding could amount to about £70 million. If that is so, the position should be rectified as quickly as possible.

How can one best sum up the demise of education in Northern Ireland, which is in a very difficult state? I have been reading a book called "Northern Ireland—The Thatcher Years". The right hon. Member for Finchley was still Prime Minister when the Minister of State introduced the Northern Ireland education reform order. The book is by Frank Graffikin and Mike Morrissey. I propose—on your instructions, Mr. Speaker—to paraphrase one of their paragraphs, because I could not think of a better way of describing the position.

The decomposition of the state school system into a number of competing institutions is ultimately based on this Government's theory of social Darwinism—the survival of the fittest. The real agenda behind the reforms may be the construction of a three-tier system, made up of independent schools—schools in the private sector and the city technology colleges—public sector schools, both grant-maintained and local education authority, well enough reinforced by parental choice and the voluntary sector, and a third sector—an underclass of school located in areas of poverty, forced to exist on basic funding and less cushioned than previously by discretionary funding by the local education authorities.

I regret to say that that is what we have in the Northern Ireland education system at the moment. Perhaps, in a year's time, when roles are reversed and Labour Members are on the Government Benches, we can put that problem right.

11.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): If I tried to answer all the points that have been covered in this varied, interesting and always lively debate, I could spend at least half an hour answering the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and probably still only deal with half the points that he made. Having said that, I shall do my best.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) asked about the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) drew attention to the problems of his district council in that regard. I have nothing to add to what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, except that the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland does not issue endorsements for any particular banks. I do not think that even the hon. Member for Leicester, South would wish the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland to advise him on where to place his savings. What we do is refer local authorities to banks on the Bank of England's list. But as my hon. Friend said —and, of course, without commitment—my officials will meet the officials of the council to discuss the implications.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South, who is usually careful with his words, had one slight slip when he talked about the Royal Victoria hospital "opting out" of the national health service. Perhaps he has listened too much to the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards). There is absolutely no question of the Royal Victoria, or any other hospital that wants to become a trust, opting out of the NHS.

The question for the Government is whether the health service boards, as purchasers, will determine the type and volume of patient care that will be provided by the hospitals. If the hospitals wish to establish themselves as trusts—which I believe would make them much closer to the communities they serve—the question is whether they will be able to provide, in a competitive way, services to the boards in the best interests of the patients. It is to the best interests of the patients that the health service reforms are directed.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South spoke about the ravages of the past 12 years of Conservative Government in Northern Ireland. That was echoed by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). I am not absolutely sure how often they visit the Province. Those who come to Belfast, Londonderry or the small towns of Ulster will see a difference in the economic livelihood of Northern Ireland that cannot be compared with the position that we inherited from the Labour Government.

I accept that unemployment as a percentage is higher in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain, but when the Labour party left power, unemployment in the Province was 2·3 times that of Great Britain; now it is only 1·7. There is nothing in our record of which we cannot be proud.

I am aware of the views of the hon. Member for Leicester, South on Northern Ireland Electricity. The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), with whom in Committee I discussed the question of gas in Northern Ireland, will be interested to know that British Gas has now shown an interest in the purchase of a generator in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) said that he has ambitions to be standing in my place this time next year. If he can do anything to ensure that he is not in charge of Northern Ireland—should that day ever come, and I doubt that it will—I shall do so. Let us consider Labour policy and, if it were ever put into operation, the effect that it would have on the economy of Northern Ireland.

The privatisation of Harland and Wolff and of Shorts would never have happened. Those two companies, which had been a millstone around the neck of the economy of Northern Ireland and which had demoralised their work forces, are now two immensely successful businesses. What would a 60 per cent. tax rate do for incentives in Northern Ireland? What would the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who said that he would like to be the last Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, do for the confidence of business people thinking about investing in Northern Ireland? Very little, I suspect. What confidence can come from a Government who would say to the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, "We think you are wrong; we would like you to go somewhere else"?

The hon. Member for Wigan said that he would abolish the grammar schools in Northern Ireland. I am sure that that will be greeted with pleasure by all the parents who

[Mr. Richard Needham]

have this week, as he said, seen their children get the opportunity for an educational service that gives the highest levels of attainment in the country. Of course he is right to draw attention to the problems of those at the lowest end. That is why the Government, through "Making Belfast Work" and "Making Derry Work", and through the programmes that we are initiating in the most deprived areas, are concentrating resources in that sphere.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) became Minister with responsibility for education, those with no qualification stood at 24·6 per cent.; now it is 16·4 per cent. We are moving in the right direction. The hon. Member for Wigan would have slightly more credit in this House if he did not knock Northern Ireland and at the same time follow a policy that would take it out of the United Kingdom and undermine and immensely damage the confidence of Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) said that we do not have an economic strategy. As I said, some Opposition Members do not appear to visit Northern Ireland very often. However, we do have a strategy, and it is called "Competing in the Nineties". We aim to have a strategy which matches inward investment with the growth of small businesses in Northern Ireland and we back winners. We want to do that through a partnership. We are doing it through a partnership in Northern Ireland with business people. I agree with the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder): I do not mind business people being involved in politics. The more involved in politics they are, the happier I would be.

In the Northern Ireland context, it is that partnership that we are determined to achieve, and we are already beginning to show the successes of that partnership in the way that we are managing to ride the recession, as the right hon. Member for Strangford said. That is an extraordinary achievement, which is due entirely to the people of Northern Ireland. They are managing to get through the recession better than any other region of the United Kingdom. This is the first time that that has happened since the 1920s. It is due entirely to the confidence that the Northern Ireland people have in themselves, which would be wrecked if the hon. Member for Wigan ever found himself on this side of the Dispatch Box.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked me about Harland and Wolff and the child support agency. Harland and Wolff is eligible for intervention aid grant under the EC seventh directive, and that also applies to the purchase of engines. The hon. Gentleman made the point about employing disabled members of staff, and I shall certainly consider that, but the majority of the staff there are new.

The right hon. Member for Strangford and others referred to the MacSharry proposals and the problem of the damage that they could cause to Northern Ireland agriculture. The Government cannot tonight give definitive answers to those proposals which, as hon. Members said, have only been tabled today. However, the Government will firmly resist any proposals that are not fair to our farmers, and that obviously includes Northern Ireland farmers.

Having said that, I quite accept the need in Northern Ireland to ensure that agriculture works together. Many hon. Members will have read the Davies report, which offers a way forward in the dairy industry. We have some fine companies in Northern Ireland in the beef, poultry and dairy industries. They must work together to give added value and a product that we can export throughout the United Kingdom and Europe.

The right hon. Member for Strangford talked about advance factories. He said that there were no advance factories in this year's budget. Next year's budget has not yet been decided. Of the Industrial Development Board's capital budget of £20 million, £16 million will be spent on factory building, £3 million on the purchase of industrial land and £1 million on developing and landscaping industrial estates. Two advance factories, one at Glen road and another at Ballygomartin, should be completed and ready for occupation at the end of November. A further 40 acres of land will be acquired at Poleglass to meet the needs of that area of west Belfast.

I am confident that we shall continue to obtain inward investment during the next year. The figures were not as encouraging last year as the year before, but there were reasons for that. There is a recession not only here but in the United States and many other parts of Europe. However, we have in the pipeline a number of inward investment propositions which we will be able to clinch —if I might use that elegant word—during the course of the year.

It is worth reminding the House that we have had inward investment in the past two years from Canada, The United States, Japan, France, Korea, Norway, Germany, Great Britain—a range of countries. We are now managing to improve our image and obtain a quality of investment which, contrary to what the right hon. Member for Strangford said, I do not believe will necessarily disappear at the first wave of recession that comes along. We should never forget the importance of smaller companies in Northern Ireland and the need to grow them and to back and support them, which is the basis of our strategy.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about urban development grant being too slow. I take that point, and it is something that I shall look into. He also talked about the urban development programme as supported by the international fund for Ireland and the need to ensure that that programme spreads equally in the east and the west of the Province. I quite understand the right hon. Gentleman's point on that. Clearly we must look to those areas in Northern Ireland, whether they are east, west, north or south, which have the greatest problems and deal with them. That is exactly what we shall do. If we can get enough funding, we shall spread it as widely as we can.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will excuse me if I do not go into too much detail regarding his school points. However, I shall make sure that my right hon. and noble Friend the Paymaster General provides him with a reply.

Three hon. Members referred to the reduction of acute services at Ards. There is no question of any change being made in acute services at Ards, unless there were to be a major refurbishment at the Ulster, which is five miles away. Even if that were to be proposed, there would have to be public consultation—as would happen, as the hon. Member for Antrim, East said, in the case of the Moyle. The right hon. Member for Strangford referred to cuts. When I became a Health Minister, the budget for the health service in Northern Ireland was £650 million. This

year it is £1·166 billion—almost double within the space of five years. That shows the Government's commitment to the health service in Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Gentleman said that 10 per cent. of the services are in the North Down area, while 40 per cent. of the population are there. That is true. However, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, we have the City hospital, the Royal Victoria hospital and the Ulster hospital. These are very well-equipped, professional hospitals in the middle of our capital city. Yes, people have to travel to them, but when they are there they find a quality of service that many elsewhere in the world would envy.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not expect me to go into too much detail about the pedestrian crossing at Millisle, or the need for a light at Gransha. I shall happily look into the question of a light at Gransha, and into the view that there ought to be more lights there. It is felt that there is insufficient light in the area. Suffice it to say that lights sometimes shine into people's bedrooms, which they do not always like.

The right hon. Gentleman then raised a very important point about the Holyhead-Dublin-Belfast rail link. I am the Minister with responsibility for transport in Northern Ireland. Therefore, my job is to protect and expand the ports, harbours and railways of Northern Ireland. I am absolutely determined to achieve that. The vast majority of traffic in Northern Ireland is on the roads. As the right hon. Gentleman said, the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) nearly shot his fox. We have an excellent port facility. A large number of goods from the south come out through Larne to Stranraer.

The Government will do everything they can to ensure that the interests of Northern Ireland, Larne, Belfast and Warrenpoint are protected. We have a road infrastructure there. I agree with the hon. Member for Antrim, East that we must improve the A8, the road between Larne and Belfast. Everything that needs to be done will be done. We must not be complacent, but we should not be unduly concerned when we take into account the competence and the efficiency of Northern Ireland hauliers and the way that they manage to get goods into and out of Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland. I am sure that that will continue.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred—as did the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe)—to the appalling accident last night at Broughdone. I gave an undertaking to the hon. Member for Antrim, South in the absense of the hon. Member for Antrim, North that I would look immediately tomorrow into whether we can bring forward the programme for the introduction of half-barriers, to be phased in over the next few months. I give an undertaking that that will be done.

There will have to be an inquiry to discover what happened. Northern Ireland Railways has assured me that the lights were working when the accident occurred, but that will be investigated. As the hon. Member for Antrim, South said, there have been far too many such accidents, and we must do all that we can to ensure that the right system is installed as quickly as possible.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North gave us a dissertation on nominees to boards. For those boards for which I have responsibility, one of my concerns is to ensure that there should be a community and a sex balance, but the main concern is to ensure that all those boards contribute to the success of the organisation in which they serve. I am not aware of and have no evidence of any political discrimination. The political views of those who serve on the boards are irrelevant to the jobs that they must do.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the hospital at Coleraine. He has heard me talking about that more times than he would wish. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East also mentioned the hospital, but I must state that I no longer have responsibility for it, although I hope that a decision can be made soon.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North also mentioned his problems with a planning officer in his constituency. I look forward to meeting the officer with the hon. Gentleman, so that we can discuss how he goes about his business. Northern Ireland is a very beautiful part of the United Kingdom. Some of us—I count myself as one—feel that some planning decisions taken in Northern Ireland during the past few years have perhaps allowed too many foreign-looking bungalows on our hilltops. Through a policy of siting, location and design we are trying to stop the rural sprawl that has developed in, for example, Donegal.

I was grateful for the support of the hon. Member for North Down for the planning office. However, I accept that there must be sensitivity and an understanding of local circumstances. It is difficult to achieve a balance, and where there are problems, hon. Members know that I am always prepared to do what I can to try to find a solution. Nevertheless, it will not always be possible. If we are to protect the environment in Northern Ireland for the future, we shall not be able to give everyone what they think is reasonable and what they desire.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Rathlin Island, and I was grateful for his compliments. I agree that there is a need for the harbours, and work on them is in progress. I have already dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point about agriculture.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East mentioned the incinerator. I compliment him on his investigation into and work on it. I understand his suggestion that we proceed with caution. I have already said that the incinerator will be subject to an environmental impact assessment and a very thorough public inquiry. All the issues will have to be fully debated and resolved, and seen to be debated and resolved.

I shall not deal in detail with the matters that the hon. Gentleman raised, because they will be discussed during the inquiry. I agree that it is important to protect the green image. He asked me about my discussions with Mr. Flynn. The question is, do we need an incinerator in the island of Ireland? Can the waste be disposed of indefinitely elsewhere? What is happening to the waste at the moment? Are we sure that it is being disposed of properly?

What will happen if we do not build an incinerator? Will we lose jobs in the places creating the waste if the waste cannot be got rid of? That may be a real fear in the future. All the issues need to be discussed and will be discussed. I make the point to the hon. Gentleman that we cannot just say that the waste can disappear.

The hon. Member for North Down said that incinerators can be dangerous. I suspect that toxic waste can be rather more dangerous than an incinerator, if the incinerator is properly run. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East made a fair point about the need to have it properly run, controlled and manned. I agree with

[Mr. Richard Needham]

the hon. Gentleman that all those matters will have to be discussed in the fullest detail and depth, and will have to be argued out publicly.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East made some fairly derogatory comments about the Local Enterprise Development Unit, and I am glad that the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) put a little balance on that. Bank managers are not much easier than LEDU is on inventors. We give 50 per cent. of a maximum grant up to £1,000 for an invention. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East mentioned three cases. It is important that the chairman of LEDU, who is a business man and is meant to represent the interests of his clients, gets to grips with the three cases. Perhaps we could get together with the three people concerned and discuss the matter with the chairman to see how we can take it forward.

The hon. Member for South Down mentioned farming, and I hope that he will agree that I have dealt with that. He also mentioned training and the fishermen. I will take that matter up with the Training and Employment Agency, and I will bring the other points about fishing to the attention of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley).

The hon. Gentleman also made the point about there being only one annexe to the training centre in South Down. I understand that point, which was not dissimilar to that made by the hon. Member for Antrim, East, who was concerned about what we do with the work force at GEC and with the training centre there. I understand the point about the lack of transport facilities to get people to and from such training centres. I will look into the matter and discuss it later with the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for South Down also spoke about an Industrial Development Board-LEDU merger. I have some sympathy with the concept, but the problem is that it would require statutory regulation. We do not have enough time to do that. We must consider how we can build our economic strategy with our present institutions. However, I accept that we must ensure that they work as closely together as possible. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the IDB is very aware of the pressures that he and other hon. Members bring on back office and inward investment. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that tourism is crucial to the Mournes and the St. Patrick's trail. I may initially have had something to do with starting that. I agree that it is an important aspect.

The hon. Member for South Down mentioned roads. We are, as I have told hon. Members before, having a review of the whole road system. I cannot give answers at the moment, but I will do so as soon as possible. The review will probably show that we need to spend money on roads. However, the problem is that, if we do that, where will the funding come from? It does not fall off a tree, and we will need to look carefully at other budgets.

The hon. Member for South Down raised a series of issues about attendance allowance and mobility allowance, as did the hon. Member for Belfast, South. I will bring those issues to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes. If there are particular cases, we will consider them. However, in such distressing cases, one has to consider the age of the person and his condition.

The hon. Member for North Down talked about democracy, and there was a general discussion about the way in which we conduct our business. I had hoped that, at some time over the past 10 weeks, when hon. Members were doing whatever they were doing while the rest of us did whatever we were doing, we might have moved somewhere on the matter. However, that has nothing to do with me.

I listened carefully to the points made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) about Connswater housing association and about what happened on the golf course. As I go down the Knock dual carriageway, I will consider what we can do. He made several points about disability. I have a lot of sympathy with him on the issue of what Monica Wilson said. We have a strategy in the public service. The Department of the Environment is funding three access offices for the Northern Ireland Council on Disability for three years. We are working closely to produce guidelines for developers, and we are ensuring that all public buildings have access.

I shall write to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and deal in detail with the issues that he raised. As for GEC Alsthom, there are two people who have showed some interest in the factory. We have still to market it and sell it. I cannot deal in detail with the points which were made about education in Northern Ireland. As the SACHR report has been publicised, I do not think that it gives as fair a picture as it should. Hon. Members will know that 75 per cent. of recurrent teaching costs are not included in the figures, but there is a narrow area of costs that the Government will have to examine.

I think that Northern Ireland is in good heart under the Government; it is well ruled and well financed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 11th June, be approved.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That for the remainder of the present Session Standing Order No. 97 (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland) shall have effect as if the word 'eight' were substituted for the word 'six' in line 12.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

PETITION

Castleford Hospital

11.30 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford):

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble petition of Brian Bullock on behalf of 8,289 people residing in the Pontefract and Castleford, Normanton, Hemsworth, Elmet and Wakefield constituencies showeth that I oppose the closure of the casualty minor injuries unit at Castleford hospital whether on a temporary or a permanent basis. I believe that the casualty unit provides a valuable and necessary service to the local community, and therefore thoroughly urge members of the Pontefract health authority to reconsider their decision.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Secretary of State for Health to advise the Pontefract health authority to reopen the casualty minor injuries unit at Castleford hospital on a permanent basis.

Your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Manchester Airport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

11.31 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the future of Manchester airport. I am sorry to keep my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment so late, but I am sure that he realises that it is no fault of mine that other hon. Members wished to talk until 11.30 pm.

In the past decade, Manchester airport has grown from handling 4 million passengers a year to 11 million. It is the fastest growing airport in Europe. It is important to me because it is the largest employer for my constituency. It is just outside my constituency, but it happens to employ more of my constituents than any other employer.

I pay tribute to the Government because, since they took office in 1979, Manchester airport has changed from what was basically a regional airport to become the 17th largest international airport in the world. There have been significant advances in recent years, including Cathay Pacific flying to Hong Kong, Singapore Airlines to Singapore, Qantas to Australia, South African Airlines to Johannesburg, the emirates airlines to Dubai, and British Airways and Pakistan International to Islamabad. Canada is served by both Canadian International and Air Canada.

The crunch has come largely in the efforts to get sufficient licences for United States airlines which want to serve Manchester. About five years ago, American Airlines was offered a temporary operations permit to Chicago, and I pay tribute to American Airlines for the work that it has done on the route. Things were not quite so easy as they could have been in the beginning, but the airline persevered. The route has now become the most successful and profitable of the airline's international network. That has helped to prove what many of us have always believed —that with the airport's catchment area of about 20 million people, there is always demand.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) for his work while Secretary of State for Transport. It is largely due to his persistence and it is thanks to him that an agreement was reached with the United States Government to grant a further two licences that were available to any non-London airport. There were eight applications for the licences, all the applicants choosing to serve Manchester to Atlanta in preference to any other regional airport. That says a great deal for Manchester airport. This year, those two licences were awarded to Delta Air Lines which, in the last week of June, began a service from Manchester, and to American Airlines which only last week began a service to New York, alongside that of British Airways. That shows American Airlines' faith in Manchester.

I should like to draw to my hon. Friend's attention the fact that there are 28 scheduled services between Manchester and the United States, compared with 393 from London. That illustrates the imbalance between north and south. I hope that the interest that has been evinced in introducing new services by a number of United States airlines will be given favourable consideration by the Government. After all, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who is my hon. Friend's boss, expressed support for the economic benefits that flow from the expansion of regional airports.

[Sir Fergus Montgomery]

It is good to have a Secretary of State for Transport who does not come from the great London area but from Scotland, and is therefore well aware of the problems in those parts of the United Kingdom that are further from London.

The benefits, which have been quantified, show that each new daily United States air service creates 1,400 new jobs and improves the regional economy by £14 million. That brings me to one of my main points. There are rumours that Stansted airport will soon be opened up to United States airlines. If that is true, it will not be of any assistance to the regional airports, nor will it help to relieve aviation congestion in the south-east. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to quash that rumour.

I pay tribute to the part that the Government have played in improving the regulatory process in Europe, which has allowed more opportunity for the airlines and has helped to meet demand from north-west travellers. Only a few years ago, the Manchester-Paris route had only three or four flights a day, but it now has 10. Virtually every major European city is now served from Manchester. The other important point is that Manchester has developed airline services from other British cities, so that passengers from other British cities can get to Manchester and link into its long-haul network.

All that has had an effect. Manchester has now overtaken Gatwick as the largest summer holiday airport. Last year, Manchester airport was awarded the "silver globe" award, Heathrow being second and Gatwick third. The success of Manchester Airport is also due to the provision of facilities for passengers. The construction of terminal 2, which will double the airport's capacity to 25 million passengers, is on schedule and on budget. I thank the Government for their support for the development, which they view as a project of national importance and, in that regard, have authorised the appropriate borrowing powers.

Another vital question relates to the airport's rail link. I used to think that Manchester was not very good at providing a means of getting those who land at Manchester airport into the centre of Manchester. A slight hiccup some time ago caused some anxiety, but I understand that British Rail has now allocated the money to finalise the link. Such a link is long overdue and will be an enormous asset for travellers to Manchester airport. Again I make a comparison with Stansted. The link from Stansted into central London cost £80 million and carries some 50,000 passengers a year. The Manchester rail link, even according to British Rail's conservative estimate, will carry a million people a year.

Looking to the future, several European Community issues could affect the airport. First, the possible abolition of the duty-free facilities causes a great deal of anxiety. If abolition were approved, it would mean a loss of jobs. I know that the Government have not reached a final decision and that they are sympathetic to the proposals made by Manchester airport for up to five years of transitional arrangements, thus saving jobs and avoiding a significant increase in scheduled and charter air tariffs.

Secondly, there is the worry that air tickets and holiday accommodation, which are currently exempt from value added tax, could have VAT added by the European Community. That would inevitably mean an increase in cost both for air fares and for holiday accommodation, thus threatening jobs and the stability of the vital travel industry.

My hon. Friend the Minister may be interested to know that I recently received through the post a copy of a letter from a man called B. A. Didsbury, the district secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. The letter was sent to an Opposition Member. I have no idea where the copy came from—it came in a plain envelope and had a Manchester postmark. At first I thought that it had been wrongly sent to me, but because I have a curious nature, I suppose, I read it and I am glad that I did so. Perhaps one of the leakers who has been so helpful to the Labour party has decided that the balance should be redressed and that someone should leak something to the Conservative party.

Whoever sent the letter to me has my thanks, as it makes interesting reading. I will gladly let my hon. Friend the Minister have a copy of the whole letter to pass on to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport who, I believe, should see it. I will quote just one extract:

"Increasingly, elected members are refusing to be involved with local authority grievance and disciplinary procedures, and have almost totally withdrawn from negotiations.

Likewise at Manchester Airport where councillors, who are directors, repeatedly have refused to meet with shop stewards. Fortunately, for as long as the Airport remains in local ownership, then the underlying company policies can be influenced by political, rather than strictly economic considerations.

To this end, and following stupendous efforts by Paul McDermott and other branch officials, airport workers are forming themselves into a political pressure group. This, we intend, will have a significant impact on local Labour Parties. The Airport and the job security of its workers will become a major political consideration in the selection and promotion of local Labour Party candidates."

I do not know what my my hon. Friend the Minister thinks about Mr. Didsbury, but he scares me—to him, economic factors are unimportant, but political commitment is the thing.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Is my hon. Friend aware that it has been estimated, I believe, by Councillor Howarth, who is a former chairman of the airport, that excess manning costs at Manchester airport amount to £2 million per year? Does he agree that that should be dealt with, because Manchester airport has a great future as an airport which serves more United Kingdom airports than any other airport in this country?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: I agree with my hon. Friend. Councillor Howarth was once a Labour Member of Parliament. He is a moderate member of the Labour party and not part of the far left fringe. The type of policy suggested by Mr. Didsbury is similar to what we saw behind the iron curtain in eastern Europe, and we all know where such policies led the people of eastern Europe.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport should be made aware of such happenings because if such a policy is allowed it will not bode well for the future of Manchester airport. It could put at risk all the great achievements of the airport in the past decade.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can give me some hope that the benefits that have accrued to Manchester airport in the past 10 years will continue and that a watchful eye will be kept on people using that airport for political ends rather than for the good of the community.

11.44 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): First I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) on his constructive speech. I also congratulate him on having secured this debate at a much more civilised hour than was possible for yesterday's Adjournment debate.

The final part of my hon. Friend's speech was the sting in the tail and gave a revealing insight into the secret socialist agenda and the brazen abuse of power that that so often involves. I shall be pleased to see the letter to which my hon. Friend referred and to pass it on to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

One thing is absolutely certain. Manchester airport, a fine airport, should be developed not for the benefit of socialist trade unionists, but for the benefit of customers. As a result of its success, it should be able to ensure that there are good employment prospects for its workers. The letter referred to by my hon. Friend was most disturbing, and I am glad that he brought it to the attention of the House.

I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to put on record the Government's appreciation of the contribution made by Manchester airport to air travel in this country and internationally. The recent topping out of Manchester's second terminal by my right hon. and learned Friend was another milestone in that airport's history. The airport has been so successful in recent years that milestones come thick and fast.

It is only two years since the new domestic complex, capable of handling up to 2·5 million passengers a year, was opened. Now the airport is well on the way to completing capacity to handle an additional 6 million international passengers a year. Apart from the London airports, no other United Kingdom airport has total current capacity for 6 million passengers, let alone an expansion programme of that size. Ten years ago, Manchester handled about 4·5 million passengers; now it handles more than 10 million—my hon. Friend quoted 11 million—and the prospects for the future are looking good.

We welcome the development of the first phase of the second terminal at Manchester airport and the substantial increase in capacity that it will bring. It is a testimony to the importance of regional airports and the development of air services to and from them. It is a tribute to the vision, skills and hard work of those responsible for Manchester airport and it is a tribute to British efforts to open up new possibilities for services to and from regional airports.

We want to see regional airports handling all the traffic that they can attract, not only for the benefits that this brings for those living in the region, but for the contribution that it can make to relieving pressure on the London airports. As the third largest airport in the United Kingdom, Manchester airport plays a vital role in our regional airports policy. In the past decade, the Government have approved supplementary credit and borrowing allocations for Manchester airport amounting to some £132 million, almost 43 per cent. of the total allocations for local authority airports over this period. Manchester already enjoyes scheduled services or chartered flights to more than 140 destinations. The new terminal, when it is ready in two years' time, will increase the airport's ability to provide a still wider range and greater frequency of services.

During the past half dozen years, the United Kingdom has put the issue of opening up new routes on to the political agenda, and major changes have been delivered. That is most striking within the European Community, where services can now be operated to any point, save the Azores and the Greek Islands. That is the result of the initiative taken during our last presidency in 1986.

The opening up of routes is only one part of liberalisation. The whole paraphernalia of out-moded bilateral air services restrictions needs to be opened up if free and fair competition is to follow. Negotiations of a third and final stage of EC liberalisation is about to begin, culminating in the next United Kingdom presidency at the end of 1992. However, much progress has already been made. As an illustration, there are now more than 40 air services from Manchester to other EC airports. There are some 200 services from British regional airports to points in other European countries.

We concentrated on Europe first, as the extent to which old restrictions were holding back development of regional services seemed greatest there, but we have not been idle elsewhere. Manchester has a good range of transatlantic services at present. British Airways flies to New York and Orlando. American Airlines has had a service to Chicago for some time and recently introduced a service to New York. As my hon. Friend said, Delta Airlines introduced a service to Atlanta at the end of June.

Those services result, in part, from an agreement which we reached with the United States in 1990. I was grateful for the tribute that my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale paid to our right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), who played an important part in that agreement. Under its terms, three new routes were created to United Kingdom regional airports for United States carriers. One of those opportunities was immediately used to provide cover for the service provided by American Airlines to Chicago, which had been operating informally for some time. The other two new opportunities could be used for services to any regional airport. The United States chose to use those opportunities for additional services to Manchester, resulting in the recent inauguration of the Delta Airlines service to Atlanta and a service by American Airlines to John F. Kennedy Airport in New York.

The fact that Manchester was chosen is indeed a tribute to the attractiveness of Manchester as a destination for transatlantic services, but it also reflects a lot of hard work by the airport authorities and others to ensure that the airlines were aware of the facilities and traffic opportunities available.

The 1990 agreement also resulted in new rights from regional airports for United Kingdom carriers and, at present, there are three route opportunities available which could be used by United Kingdom carriers to provide services from Manchester to United States destinations. Whether they do so is a commercial matter for the airlines, but if they so decide, they will find no Government or bureaucratic obstacles in their way.

We know that there is probably unsatisfied demand for route opportunities. More United States carriers wanted to fly than could be covered by the two route opportunities on offer, but further services by United States carriers will depend on new rights being negotiated under the Bermuda 2 air services agreement and, as a first step, the United States authorities will have to come forward with proposals.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

We would certainly consider such proposals with a clear view in mind of the advantages of additional services to the airport and the region. We want to see regional airports develop further. Our past actions underline that commitment, but creation of new rights for the United States must bring about appropriate new opportunities for our carriers. It would be wrong to allow advantages to the United States which could distort the balance of opportunities in the market to an extent that would be unfair to our airline industry.

I think that a better approach than piecemeal trading of rights is to look at the transatlantic market to the United States as a whole. We need to consider with the United States whether the present arrangements provide for fair, effective and healthy competition by the airlines of both sides, or whether changes are necessary. We need to consider whether sufficient opportunities are available for services or whether they can be expanded. We also need to consider whether unnecessary restrictions and regulations can be removed.

We have therefore been engaged in liberalisation talks with the United States for some time. Good progress is being made, but there are difficult issues to be tackled. Consequently, it is not possible to say when conclusions will be reached. Neither side has ruled anything out of the discussion. We are looking at fundamental issues, such as cabotage rights and inward investment in United States carriers. We shall also consider such key marketing issues as use—or abuse—of frequent flier programmes, use of computer reservation systems and opportunities for commercial arrangements between airlines. We shall look at the route structure and the availability of route opportunities generally, as well as to regional airports, including Manchester.

What we want from liberalisation is fair competition, which should bring benefits for all concerned—not just for airlines and airports, but for their customers and the economy as a whole. We do not want—and are concerned to guard against—scope for abuse of market dominance, leading to the extinction of competition.

We have also been successfully pursuing liberalisation elsewhere in the world—with, for example, Canada, Singapore and New Zealand. We are in the midst of talks with Thailand. A standard element of liberalisation is to remove restriction of routes from regional airports, so that services can be from any point in one country to any point in the other.

There is a myth that we agree to new routes to or from regional airports only when that suits British airlines, and I should like to dispel it. As I said, we see liberalisation as good for all concerned: airlines, certainly, but airports and customers at large as well. If we had a request for a route to a regional airport that was not possible under present arrangements, we would also look carefully at that region's interests in considering what to do, but we would probably suggest a wider opening up of opportunities through liberalisation.

We are concerned to see that international services to and from regional airports continue to develop strongly. The Government intend to play their part, in opening up scope for fair competition, by making sure that the necessary opportunities are there, but a characteristic of liberalisation is that it opens up opportunities before airlines are ready for them. There could be services to Manchester from Japan, New Zealand and Malaysia, for example, to add to those introduced in the last year or so from Hong Kong and Pakistan.

Perhaps the airlines have not wanted to take up these opportunities, but there is a challenge here for Manchester and other regional airports: to go out and try to interest the airlines concerned, British and foreign, in starting new services. Officials in the Department of Transport are, of course, ready to help—in advising on what is already available and in opening up new opportunities that look desirable.

My hon. Friend referred to a rumour about Stansted. It is a matter for the United States authorities whether they come forward with proposals for additional route rights to Stansted and/or new rights involving regional airports. The Government's negotiations will have to take account of what is proposed, but we do not envisage acting outside that negotiating framework.

My hon. Friend also referred to the fraught issue of duty-frees. So far, the European Commission has not brought out any specific proposals to end intra-Community duty-free shopping, but that termination would indeed be a side effect of the current technical proposals for VAT and excise control systems after 1992. The matter has not yet been discussed in Brussels, but the Government recognise that the duty-free trade is important to the United Kingdom industry and economy, and we are very aware of the concerns of all involved.

My hon. Friend also referred to the Manchester airport rail link. I understand that British Rail fully intends that the rail link will be operational by planned completion date of May 1993. Work is well under way and, although contracts for some of the infrastructure and rolling stock are still to be placed, the management of BR's regional railways see the link as a high priority. That link will greatly improve access to the airport and generally boost the economy of the north-west because, for the first time, passengers will be able to travel by train direct not only from central Manchester but from as far afield as Blackpool, Leeds and Hull. There has been fine co-operation between the passenger transport authority, BR and Manchester airport company.

It is not just Members of Parliament or Ministers from the regions who can understand the importance of Manchester airport. I have often used it and found its facilities very useful. There is no doubt that it has a valuable role to play in future, provided that that role is not undermined by the sort of trade union irresponsibility to which my hon. Friend referred.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 July 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL

[Lords] (By Order)

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday 18 July.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday 18 July.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 3) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 16 July at 7 o'clock.

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL

[Lords] (By Order)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 18 July.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 May], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 18 July.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM ETC.) BILL

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham etc.) Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

Ordered,

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the present Session;

Ordered,

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

Ordered,

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the present Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

Ordered,

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the present Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

Ordered,

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be standing Orders of the House.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL

Motion made. That the Promoters of the British Railways Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the present Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and, having been amended by the Committee in the present Session, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government of Province

1. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made in the current discussions on the future of the Province.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): As I said in my statement to the House on 3 July, although the talks that I announced on 26 March have now been brought to a conclusion, I believe that it is the clear wish of the people of the United Kingdom, and of the people of Northern Ireland in particular, that the process of dialogue should continue. I therefore hope that it will prove possible, in due course, to explore with the Northern Ireland parties and with the Irish Government whether terms for fresh discussions can be established.

Mr. Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend accept the support of the whole House for the tremendous way in which he has taken the talks so far? In the context of Northern Ireland's history, 10 weeks is too short a period for substantive talks; indeed, many would think that, given the background of recent years, 10 weeks is sufficient only to get the administrative and procedural matters out of the way. Will my right hon. Friend try to ensure that in future there is an adequate timetable, spanning a considerable length of time, so that we can at long last defeat the evil terrorist, who would try to run Ireland to the detriment of its people and the people of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. Anyone who is involved in the affairs of Northern Ireland, and those of the island of Ireland, will be aware that the passage of 10 weeks, in the context of 400 years, is but a hiccup. I shall certainly bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said about a timetable, but that is very much a matter for other participants in the talks. It would be wholly premature for me to predict their reactions at this stage.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Secretary of State realise that, in this week alone, he has had to answer questions in the House about the location of a street light at Gransha presbyterian church and about when he intends to arrange for a pothole to be filled at Cairnshill in Castlereagh? Have we not reached the stage when the Secretary of State should look back at previous Conservative policy and, at least, begin to restore real local government powers to Northern Ireland? I believe that, talks or no talks, there is some scope to give local government control back to the people of Northern Ireland. Surely the right hon. Gentleman agrees with that.

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned subjects that have been drawn to my attention during the past few days. I recognise the force of what he says. However, the framework within which these matters would be looked at would be the one in which all the political parties in Northern Ireland have been involved during the past 18 months. I recognise the relevance of what the right hon. Gentleman says and I shall certainly bear it in mind as and when we look at these matters again in the reasonably near future.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Does the Secretary of State agree that a new talks process is more than simply a gap between conference meetings? Will he assure the House that he will not become susceptible to arguments being advanced in some quarters that he should attempt to impose a solution as a result of the breakdown of the talks process?

Mr. Brooke: I hope that the hon. Gentleman knows me well enough, as a result of the events of the past 18 months, to realise the importance that I attach to any arrangements that we might make in Northern Ireland being capable of commanding widespread support. The basis of the past 20 years does not lead one to suppose automatically that a proposal by Her Majesty's Government would necessarily enjoy such support.

Mr. McNamara: Can the Secretary of State enlighten the House about his use of the word "fresh"? Does he mean new or a continuation of the old? As all the parties to the talks expressed their sadness that they had to be discontinued and a willingness to talk in future, can he say when he expects to initiate his new round of bilateral talks?

Mr. Brooke: In response to the hon. Gentleman's question about the word "fresh", I should remind the House that the talks that we concluded on 3 July, arising from my statement on 26 March, were concluded on the basis of the ground rules that were established in the statement of 26 March. Therefore, any new talks would be new talks, in the sense that we would establish fresh ground rules for them. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that I am sufficiently conservative to pay some attention to the past in looking forward to the future. As for the hon. Gentleman's question about initiation, he will recall that on 3 July I said to the House that I would be listening for noises in the undergrowth.

Mr. McGrady: In view of the answer that the Secretary of State gave to the first question, is he aware of the statement made by the leader of the Democratic Unionist party, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley)? As the Unionist parties have adopted a joint approach, it must be taken to be the approach of both parties that the talks process is now dead and that there is no point in pretending that it can survive. Does the Secretary of State agree that the people of Northern Ireland require the optimism and the hope that the talks will be revived? After the marching season, which we enter at midnight tonight, and the holiday period will he use his best offices to convince the Unionist parties that the future of Northern Ireland and its people will be best served by a revival of the talks, not from the start but based on the very useful exchanges that have already taken place? Could that not be a starting point in the autumn?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is probably referring to the second question that I was asked. I was aware that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) had made a statement not only on 3 July but more recently. As always with pronouncements by the hon. Member for Antrim, North, I read it with great care and I think that I detected what it was saying to me. As to the precise verb that we use to describe what the new talks may

be, provided that I do not use the word "resume" I think that the House and, conceivably, the hon. Member for Antrim, North, would allow me to use other verbs.

Mr. Budgen: Since yet another initiative has suffered at least a temporary reverse, does not my right hon. Friend agree that the Order in Council procedure, adopted as a temporary measure in 1972, ought to be abandoned so that, at the very least, important Northern Ireland legislation is properly discussed in detail and can be amendable? Is it not the case that Northern Ireland is at present a constitutional slum?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his use of the words "temporary reverse". The changes in the legislative proceedings of the House were the subject of observations by all parties during the talks—I do not think that I am infringing confidentiality when I say that. Therefore, I am confident that it is a subject to which we shall return. I am not in the habit of describing Northern Ireland as a slum under any conditions.

Security

2. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation.

4. **Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: Since I answered a similar question on 13 June, four people have been killed as a result of the security situation, two of whom were civilians, one a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment and one a regular soldier. Tragic though that is, were it not for the vigilance of the security forces the figure might well have been much higher.

I am sure that the House will join me once again in praising the brave men and women of the police and Army for the difficult and often dangerous work of bringing to justice those terrorists responsible for the most horrendous crimes.

Mr. Molyneaux: Can the Secretary of State say when he may be able to make a statement about a retrial of the Ulster Defence Regiment Four? Does he share my concern about the virtual dismissal of the three members of the Police Authority and a related resignation? Does he agree that it is essential that the remaining appointments should be used to restore the political balance in the Police Authority so that it retains credibility?

Mr. Brooke: I hope soon to be able to determine whether there should be a reference to the Court of Appeal in the case of the UDR Four. I think that in his second question, the right hon. Gentleman was asking me to regret something. I made those appointments myself and, therefore, I stand by them.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the right hon. Gentleman hold an inquiry into security around the Glenanne UDR base? Will he discover why three sides of that base were protected while a fourth side, from where the bomb came, was totally unprotected, although it has a boundary with a dangerous IRA ghetto area? Will he assure the people of Glenanne that that base will be rebuilt, because if it is not, there will be an exodus of the people living in that area? Can he give the House that assurance today? Will he also consider speaking to the Prime Minister and having conveyed to Her Majesty the Queen the great pride and honour that was done to Ulster with the presentation of the well-deserved colours to the Ulster Defence Regiment and the magnificent speech that Her Majesty gave on that occasion?

Mr. Brooke: I have some familiarity with the issue involved in the hon. Gentleman's first question and with the inquiries that have already been made about the protection of the base. The question of rebuilding is more a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, but I understand the question. I share with the hon. Gentleman the pride of the Province that Her Majesty the Queen should have visited Northern Ireland, in part, to present the colours of the four battalions of the UDR. I think that they well warranted the honour that Her Majesty bestowed upon them.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Secretary of State accept that many of us will be more than disappointed at his response to the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) about appointments to the Police Authority? I noted how he paid tribute to the people who serve in the security forces. Is it not then rather strange that two ex-members of the security forces, one of whom suffered horrific injuries at the hands of the IRA but has continued to give unstinting public service down the years, are among the three people who have been summarily dismissed by the Secretary of State, although they acted as chairman and vice-chairman respectively of committees of the Police Authority? Is that the way that men of experience and positive opinion are to be treated in the Police Authority?

Mr. Brooke: I entirely take the hon. Gentleman's point and I am happy to respond to a further question on the same subject. I have paid tribute to the members of the Police Authority who served on it until the end of June. I should say, so that the House is not misled, that no one has been summarily dismissed. A new authority needed to be appointed and invitations were issued for people to serve on it. I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the service that the Police Authority renders, and it is important that it continues to do so on behalf of the community.

Rev. William McCrea: Does not the Secretary of State understand the great fear in the Northern Ireland community in the light of the Chief Constable's report and warning of a great increase in violence in the coming months? The Chief Constable has promised the people of Northern Ireland that the Army and the security forces will contain that threat. After 22 long years of violence and slaughter by the IRA in Northern Ireland, would not the Secretary of State expect the people of Northern Ireland to demand that the IRA is defeated rather than contained?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman's reference to the Chief Constable's report is apposite. The Chief Constable said that this was as dangerous a time as the Province had faced in recent months. The statement that he made on behalf of the security forces was that, however dangerous the threat, it would be resisted by the security forces. The hon. Gentleman knows well the Government's views on ensuring that terrorism is defeated.

Mr. Stanbrook: Does not the Chief Constable want more men to enable the Royal Ulster Constabulary to do its job more effectively? Will my right hon. Friend permit an increase in its establishment?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend raises a subject which has been raised before in the House. In the first instance, the Chief Constable made to the Police Authority a submission, which in due course will come to me. The Chief Constable has requested more men, but over a significant period. I am considering that request with all the seriousness that it demands.

Mr. McNamara: On the composition of the Police Authority, does the Secretary of State agree that it is essential that it has the support of all sections of the community? In so far as appointments have been made by the Secretary of State and previous Secretaries of State, they have sought to achieve that end. One regrets only that sometimes people who have been invited to send representatives have failed to do so.

On the defence statement, is the Secretary of State aware that we welcome the decision that the ratio of permanent members of the UDR to part-timers should be increased, but nevertheless we hope for a return to full and proper policing. I join the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) in urging the Secretary of State to reach a quick decision about the Chief Constable's request and to consider whether more members of the RUC are necessary in view of the changes that are resulting from the defence review.

Mr. Brooke: I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about the need for the Police Authority to be representative of the community and to enjoy its respect and support. The Chief Constable has requested further policemen, which will require considerable increased funding, and he has explained why he needs them. That consideration will weigh in our determination of the decision.

Employment Action

5. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to introduce the employment action programme into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): No. The action for community employment, ACE, programme in Northern Ireland already provides work experience on local projects similar to the proposed employment action programmes.

Mr. Dover: Will the Under-Secretary of State confirm that the action for community employment programme already provides 9,500 jobs for long-term unemployed people on local schemes? Does not that say a lot for the schemes there, compared with the arrangements here, in that they are far better than those in the rest of the United Kingdom? What would happen if Labour's minimum wage policy were introduced? What would be the effect on the programme?

Mr. Needham: The undoubted effect on the programme if Labour introduced a minimum wage would, unfortunately, be that many people who are currently employed would end up on the ACE programme. My hon. Friend is right—there are 9,600 on the ACE programme in Northern Ireland. Because of our level of long-term unemployment, that is much higher than any of us would wish. Nevertheless, when business is struggling in a very difficult market and when the multi-fibre arrangement is likely to be scrapped in the next few years, the imposition of a minimum wage in Northern Ireland could have devastating consequences in many parts of the Province. I hope that that day will never come.

Mr. Beggs: Two months ago, when the Minister was speaking about the unemployment figures in Northern Ireland, he said:

"I am convinced that the Northern Ireland economy remains robust and is weathering this difficult period much better than other regions within the UK."

Now that unemployment has reached 13·7 per cent. of the population and is still rising slowly every month, does the Minister believe that further steps need to be taken to make additional provision for those who are likely to become unemployed? If so, will he make a commitment to that end? Does he agree that we must maximise the use of the expertise within our further education colleges?

Mr. Needham: The figures show that the Northern Ireland economy is still robust and is weathering the recession better than any other region of the United Kingdom. Unemployment in the north of Ireland has risen by about 2 per cent. in the past year compared with an average of 40 per cent. in the rest of the country. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it would be right and prudent for the Government to ensure that if unemployment continues to grow—albeit at a fairly low rate—there are programmes in place to ensure that people who lose their jobs are properly catered for. We are also considering a major increase in the job training programme this year. In the light of announcements about a package over here, I have asked my officials to put together a package for Northern Ireland to deal with those who are unfortunately losing their jobs.

VAT (Sporting Bodies)

6. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make grants available to sporting bodies in the Province to make up their costs incurred as a result of the raising of VAT; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): No, Sir. However, where assistance has been offered towards capital schemes to be undertaken by such bodies, grant will be based on the full approved costs, including value added tax at the current rate.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that the increase in VAT from 15 to 17·5 per cent. is costing the British Horse Society £52,000 a year in revenue, which comes entirely from members' subscriptions, and that a large part of it comes from Northern Ireland where the society does much excellent work for all sections of the community including disabled people? Will he consider the possibility of the cash being made up from money given to sporting bodies? Should not something be done to recoup the money which is entirely the result of voluntary giving?

Dr. Mawhinney: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in the British Horse Society and of the importance of the

work that it undertakes, not least in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education does not make grants available to the British Horse Society, but I hope that my hon. Friend will be encouraged to learn that the Sports Council for Northern Ireland paid £26,717 to the Northern Ireland branch of the British Horse Society in the past financial year.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: In view of the high standards achieved by many Northern Ireland men and women who have been encouraged by good coaching and by having taken part in international events such as those held at the Mary Peters and Antrim tracks, does the Minister agree that both the establishment and the location of a centre of excellence should be decided upon as soon as possible, so that all Northern Ireland sports men and women are given the opportunity to excel at their sport?

Dr. Mawhinney: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the facilities at the Mary Peters and Antrim tracks and visits to Northern Ireland by international athletes making use of those facilities have not only stimulated interest in athletics in the Province but have improved performance. I believe that I am right in saying that the Sports Council for Northern Ireland is considering a fairly comprehensive plan, part of which is devoted to excellence in the provision for various sports. I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of the chairman of the Sports Council.

Community Relations

7. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his monitoring of community relations in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: In recent years, the Government have introduced a wide range of programmes designed to improve community relations in Northern Ireland. The fundamental purpose of those programmes is to tackle the historic divisions that exist within society in Northern Ireland and to create conditions where all sections of the community enjoy equality of opportunity and equity of treatment. Each of the programmes is monitored on a regular basis to determine whether they are achieving the desired impact.

Mr. Coombs: Given the crucial importance of good community relations in Northern Ireland, will my hon. Friend ensure that there is rigorous monitoring machinery in place to ensure that resources are adequately and efficiently used and go to all parts of the community?

Will my hon. Friend also consider the promotion of town twinning links, such as that which has traditionally existed between the city of Belfast and the city of Birmingham—in which I have been involved myself—to spread the message of good will and to promote understanding of the problems of Northern Ireland throughout the United Kingdom?

Dr. Mawhinney: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend, and that is why all individual grants made under the community relations programme are subject to explicit objectives and targets and are monitored against agreed performance indicators. I hope that my hon. Friend will be encouraged to hear that, in the next few weeks, we shall be inviting the private sector to tender for an evaluation exercise in respect of a major programme to support community relations work within the district councils.

On my hon. Friend's second suggestion, I am sure that twinning has great advantages not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom. It is, of course, a matter for the individual towns concerned, but it would go at least some way to reduce the lack of understanding which sometimes bedevils consideration of what is happening in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Trimble: I pay tribute to the work that the Minister has done on community relations, and it is valuable work but does he agree with me that we must not fall into the trap of thinking that community relations programmes can solve the problems in Northern Ireland? Underlying the division in the community is a conflict over the nation to which the territory of Northern Ireland should belong and a territorial claim pursued by means of terrorist violence. Does the Minister agree that the best thing that could be done to improve community relations is to defeat terrorism?

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind and generous personal remarks, and I certainly agree with him that there is no sense in which success in community relations terms alone will resolve the fundamental and deep-seated problems that affect the community in Northern Ireland. There is also no doubt that the winning of the battle against terrorism will play a significant role in easing community tensions. However, I know from the hon. Gentleman's previous contributions that he agrees with me that there is, none the less, an important role for a community relations programme, and the programme is commanding greater and wider support in the Province with every passing year.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Is the Minister aware that there are many cross-community peace initiatives in Northern Ireland? The latest of them is the peace train which previously ran between Belfast and Dublin but which, on 18 July, is to run not only from Belfast to Dublin but from Holyhead to Euston, to demonstrate the opposition to the IRA's attempts to disrupt rail services in Ireland and in this country. The initiative is supported by many hon. Members and by 15 political parties in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Britain.

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes, I am aware of the variety of programmes involved in seeking to promote peace in Northern Ireland of which, as the hon. Gentleman says, the peace train is one. I hope that he will be encouraged to learn that earlier this week I visited the peace house in Belfast to see the peace people and I announced a grant of more than £61,000 for their work at their headquarters in Belfast and at their farm in Coleraine.

Mr. Stott: Is the Minister aware that we very much support his efforts and all that he is doing in respect of community relations in Northern Ireland? To that extent, has he considered renewing the grant that was taken from the Glor Na nGael organisation some months ago with a view to fostering further good community relations in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. I must say that they stand in sharp contrast to what he said about the education reform order

last night, part of which was designed to require young people to be involved in education for mutual understanding; cultural heritage; a common history curriculum and a common core religious education curriculum. All that arises from the education reform order which the hon. Gentleman so despises and they are designed to promote the cross-community benefits which, at another time at the Dispatch Box, the hon. Gentleman supports.

Drinks Measures

8. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the proposal to introduce the 35 ml measure for alcoholic drinks.

Mr. Needham: The Department issued a consultation paper in December 1990. Thirteen replies were received. After considering these replies, I have decided to permit a 35 ml measure and multiples of it in addition to a 25 ml measure for the serving of spirits.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend is one of the longest serving Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office and, it so happens, one of the most popular. He will now be even more popular. When people in pubs in the Province and, no doubt, at the famous Bushmills distillery, drink his health I am pleased to note that they will be able to choose whether to do that in 25 ml measures or 35 ml measures. He is to be congratulated on his decision and I am pleased to see that the results of his consultation process led to the right decisions being made.

Mr. Needham: I thank my hon. Friend. His representations helped us to reach this decision and I look forward to drinking his health as he drinks mine.

Kidney Dialysis

9. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hospitals in the Province kidney dialysis treatment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): The renal unit at the Belfast city hospital, which I was pleased to visit recently, provides kidney dialysis treatment for the whole of the Province and is supported by a satellite dialysis unit at Tyrone county hospital in Omagh.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Bearing in mind that there are 110 kidney patients in the Province receiving haemodialysis treatment, most of them at the renal unit at the Belfast city hospital and many of whom have to travel a considerable distance to get there, what discussions has my hon. Friend had with local nephrologists about creating another satellite unit either at Craigavon to serve the population in the south or at north Antrim for the people in the north?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I have been able to allocate an additional £300,000 this year to add to the extra £360,000 made available last year for further developments in renal services. That has already enabled an additional 19 hospital dialysis places and 10 peritoneal dialysis places. I am also pleased to announce that erythopoietin—EPO—is available for 48 patients. My hon. Friend asked for extra satellite dialysis units. With the funds that I have just announced, I am sure that discussions will bring forward the possibility of extra statellite systems and as soon as representations have been made, I will consider them very carefully indeed.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the positive note that the Minister has struck in encouraging further satellite units. Does he accept that, as well as renal dialysis, one of the drawbacks is the lack of kidney transplants?

Mr. Hanley: I thoroughly agree with the hon. Gentleman. Despite the increase in the number of patients receiving dialysis from 160 to 175, progress is still low in terms of transplant operations. We achieved about 50 last year. The reason that we cannot further increase that figure is the shortage of organs. I encourage all hon. Members and the citizens of Northern Ireland to carry a donor card.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Can my hon. Friend confirm that all new Northern Ireland driving licences now include a kidney donor statement? Will he try to ensure that the media have a chance to interview both the families of those who have donated organs and of those who have received them so that people can be made aware of the enormous life-saving benefits of successful transplants?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am pleased to credit him with much of the progress that has been achieved by including a kidney donor statement on driving licences in Northern Ireland. That was an excellent move. He has also outlined the excellent idea of showing the benefits of transplants. Transplants can bring some good our of misery by giving new life to a person who desperately needs it.

Chemical Plants

10. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has received any requests for grant for the construction of a chemical plant in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: I have not received any such request within the last two financial years.

Mr. Ross: Does that mean that the Minister does not know whether any further chemical plants will be coming to Northern Ireland? Given that the existing chemical plants hope to reduce the amount of toxic waste that they incinerate before the end of the century, where on earth does the Minister expect sufficient waste requiring incineration to arise that will require an incinerator on the island of Ireland and how does he expect the incinerator planned for the Maydown site to be economically viable if toxic waste decreases by 70 per cent?

Mr. Needham: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman, the question of the amount of waste on the island of Ireland and whether we should have an incinerator will be discussed if and when an application for such an incinerator is made. We cannot tell others that we should always be able to export our waste to them if, at the same time, we are not prepared to receive imports from others.

Labour Statistics

11. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment in the Province.

Mr. Needham: At 9 May 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 97,951 unemployed claimants in the Province, which represents a decrease of 1,059 compared with the previous month.

Mr. Cryer: Is not it scandalous that, under the Tory Government's economic policies, 100,000 people are unemployed in Northern Ireland? Will the Minister accept that when the Government came into office, as a result of sneering at the Labour Government's policies, the level of unemployment was far and away lower than the current level, as has been the case for the past 10 years? Will the incompetence of the Government and the Department of the Environment, who failed to warn local authorities about the fraud at the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, have any repercussions on jobs? The collapse of that bank will certainly not create jobs; it is much more likely to cause unemployment.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman asked my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) that question yesterday and he heard the reply. I replied to the same question during last night's debate, although the hon. Gentleman was not in his place to hear it, and I have nothing further to add. In answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, perhaps he will reflect on the fact that, when we came to power in 1979, unemployment in Northern Ireland was running at more than twice the average for Great Britain, but it is now only 1·8 times the average. The Government have, therefore, been increasingly successful in Northern Ireland, not only in producing new jobs, but in bringing down its unemployment ratio compared with the rest of the country.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: After the ranting that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), does my hon. Friend agree that the main cause of unemployment in the Province is terrorism and that the people who are principally to blame for job losses are the men of violence who discourage investment?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is, of course, right. The success of the economy of Northern Ireland which is, as I have remarked, the most successful region of the United Kingdom at the moment, could become an even bigger triumph if we did not have to deal with the scourge and misery of terrorism. The people of Northern Ireland are to be congratulated on the success that they are currently achieving.

Anglo-Irish Conference

12. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects the Anglo-Irish governmental conference to meet.

Mr. Brooke: The next meeting of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference will take place on Tuesday 16 July.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Does the Secretary of State agree that people such as the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) who possibly exult that the Brooke talks are well and truly dead, need to reflect on the irony that the Hillsborough pact is still the framework for Anglo-Irish relations and the key to the role of the Republic in Northern Ireland affairs? If it is to be replaced by something better or to have added to it a balancing relationship between the north and Dublin and between the north and London, talks will have to be resumed, preferably along the lines that the Secretary of State described earlier in replying to a question from the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

Mr. Brooke: My personal experience of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) has always been emotionally low key, so I find the word "exult" surprising in the context. In response to the hon. Gentleman's question about the Anglo-Irish Agreement, I remind him that I have said on previous occasions during discussions about possible future arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland that Her Majesty's Government would give serious consideration to any implication for the agreement of such arrangements. I confirm that in the context of the discussions we will also consider any party's proposal, including an alternative to the agreement, which would enhance the underlying objectives which I believe that we all share.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Is the Prime Minister aware that whatever reservations hon. Members may have about the rigour of his counter-inflation policy and its impact on growth, jobs and investment, it would attract more support if the Government had a more even-handed approach to it? How does he explain, for example, the statement last night by the latest power chief to receive a big pay rise—Mr. Weston of MANWEB—that the Government knew that his salary would soar?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the gentleman concerned has withdrawn that statement and withdrawn it unreservedly. As MANWEB said:

"the higher levels of pay were not agreed until after the offer for sale was announced in November 1990. The Government did not place any restriction on the regional electricity companies in announcing likely figures at any time."

That was what was said and I endorse that as an accurate statement. Salaries after privatisation are and must be a matter for the company. But I have made my view perfectly clear; in my judgment those salaries should reflect what is reasonable. But it is a matter for the companies and not for me.

Sir John Farr: Might I ask my right hon. Friend whether he has had a chance today in his list of engagements to look at the recent announcement by the Labour party that it apparently intends to——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question must refer to the Government's responsibility. I know that the hon. Gentleman has been away for a while, but his question must refer to the Government's responsibility.

Sir John Farr: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will see it as his responsibility today to have an early debate on our nuclear deterrent and the need for us to keep it. Apparently the Opposition's policy has suddenly changed. Rather than an announcement in the media, we should have a full, proper and open debate on the Floor of the House.

The Prime Minister: First, I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House after his absence. We are very pleased to see him back in his place.

My hon. Friend touched on defence, a matter of great importance not just to the House but to everyone in it and beyond it. I believe that there is considerable doubt about the position of the Opposition on defence, and I hope that they will take an early opportunity to make it clear whether they are unilaterialist and in what circumstances they would use nuclear weapons.

Mr. Hattersley: Does the Prime Minister still stick to his prediction that the British economy will recover during the second half of this year?

The Prime Minister: Apparently the right hon. Gentleman does not want to discuss defence quite so soon. I remain of the opinion that I have expressed before in the House and which has been endorsed by the OECD and the CBI: that we shall begin to move out of recession in the second half of this year.

Mr. Hattersley: Has it escaped the Prime Minister's notice that the second half of the year began 11 days ago.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hattersley: If the right hon. Gentleman's prediction has any veracity why are we still at the bottom of the economic league? Why do we have the worst record of investment, unemployment and growth of all the G7 countries?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might study the diary a little more closely to find out how long the second half of the year lasts. As usual, he is facing backwards. Five per cent. off the inflation rate and 3·5 per cent. off interest rates are both essential ingredients to get the economy moving again. That has happened and it will continue.

Mr. Hattersley: With reference to the diary, I take it that the Prime Minister is now saying that the economy will begin to improve by Christmas. Every time he makes a prediction about improvement, he gets further and further away. I shall therefore ask him a simple question based on his own pathetic analysis of when the economy might begin to improve. First, can we be assured that by Christmas and in the three areas about which I have asked the right hon. Gentleman—investment, unemployment and growth—this country will be doing at least as well as Greece, Portugal and Turkey? May we also be assured —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the Prime Minister now also answer the question from which he ran away last Tuesday? Since, during the three years of decline, he has been Chief Secretary, Chancellor and Prime Minister, will he accept his own responsibility for those three years of disaster?

The Prime Minister: On the subject of predictions, with which the right hon. Gentleman began his lengthy third question, he will recall predicting that unemployment would be 4 million in 1987—he is in no position to talk about predictions. As for the position at the end of the year, as a former sacked shadow Chancellor the right hon. Gentleman should know that we will set out our predictions in the autumn statement.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he and his Government will ensure that the military level of our forces will always be sufficient to meet the defence needs of the realm and of our military commitments overseas?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir.

South London

Q2. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister, when he will next pay an official visit to south London.

The Prime Minister: I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and I very much hope to include south London among them.

Mr. Hughes: Given that youth unemployment has risen in the four inner south London boroughs by 53 per cent. in the past year, and that more than one in two crimes in the capital are committed by young people, will the Prime Minister, as a south London boy who became the youngest Prime Minister this century, make a personal commitment to the young people of south London by coming to visit them and the youth service south of the river, to see their desperate state and to make sure that he and the Government commit the personnel, resources, training and jobs to ensure that young people today have the opportunities that he is glad he had?

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the opportunities that are necessary for young people in the inner-London area. One of the principal problems for many years was the treatment of education under the regime of the Inner London education authority, which has been continued by the disgraceful attitude that some of the inner London boroughs take to the way in which they deal with education. That dramatically damages the employment prospects of youngsters. Another factor that caused unemployment in inner London was the capacity of Labour councils, under the old system, to put up business rates to such an extent that businesses left inner London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If my right hon. Friend gets the chance to come to south-east London, he will find himself in the area covered by the Greenwich building society and the Woolwich building society. Will he see whether it is possible, on Monday when clause 52 of the Finance Bill is considered in the House, to have an open debate on the way that that clause adversely affects the Greenwich building society, but not the Woolwich building society, so that Parliament can decide openly what should happen in the future?

The Prime Minister: Parliament is always in a position to decide openly on the matters before it, and that will undoubtedly be the case when we debate the Finance Bill.

Ms. Hoey: The Prime Minister knows that unemployment has risen in south London, and that he has cut training places there. When will he put more money into training there and give young people real training prospects?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, quite apart from the general employment prospects and training that have been increased over the years, we have established two city technology colleges in south London. These will dramatically improve the prospects of the pupils in them. Prospects would be improved even more were other schools in inner London to adopt the same disciplines and to offer the same certainty of good education that CTCs offer.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: My right hon. Friend will know that the people of south Dorset believe in a strong, credible and clearly stated defence policy. Will he ensure that the policy for defence is both credible and will deter aggression, and that it is well understood? That will be in contrast to the party opposite, which believes in fudged words, so as to avoid the wrath of its Back Benchers.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right, and I believe that he speaks for many people who do not trust the Opposition on defence. Yesterday, they produced a defence policy which appeared to protect them rather than the country. People will have noticed that. One cannot defend the country with a couple of sentences tucked away in an article in *The Guardian*. This country knows the Opposition only too well and it knows their unilateralist tendencies.

Mr. Wilson: Less than a week ago, the Bank of England was giving a clean bill of health to the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. Less than a week ago, the Department of the Environment was issuing that bank's name as one suitable for local authorities to deal with. If officials of these two organisations, sitting in the heart of London, can make such a catastrophic error, does the Prime Minister have any sympathy with the officials of small local authorities in far-flung parts of the country which might have taken the advice of the Bank of England and the Department of the Environment? Will the Government and the Bank of England face up to their responsibilities in this matter?

The Prime Minister: The Bank of England acted as soon as it had evidence on which to act, and that has been made clear. It would not be right to give preferential treatment to local authorities over other depositors of the BCCI. Any accountant of finance director should know that if an institution pays over the market rate of interest, it is in the form of a risk premium. Local authorities have a duty of care over the funds entrusted to them and that implies taking a prudent view of risk and spreading risk.

Q4. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Hicks: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that in the drawing up of the Government's Green Paper on industrial relations, he will take full account of the poll in *The Guardian* today, which shows clear majorities against a return to secondary action, flying pickets and unofficial strikes—policies which are all supported by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. Our trade union legislation has brought unprecedented improvements in industrial relations. Of course, they are unprecedented improvements which are not welcome to the Labour party. As Mr. Ron Todd said earlier this week:

"Tory industrial relations law has got to go. There is no fudging the issue."

Labour's position is absolutely clear. As the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) said when he spoke to the TGWU yesterday—*[Interruption.]* As the right hon. Gentleman said—*[Interruption.]* I can wait, Mr. Speaker —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us hear the end of the Prime Minister's answer.

The Prime Minister: I know that Labour Members are embarrassed by what their leader said, but they are going to hear it. He said about the TGWU:

"This union is the Labour party in so many ways."

He was right. The union calls the shots, it chooses the policies, and it even picks the leaders.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week, and will he recommend to the Prime Minister that he reads Matthew Parris in *The Times*?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 JULY—Progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

Motion on the Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order.

TUESDAY 16 JULY—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 17 JULY—Opposition day (18th allotted day)—(1st part). Until seven o'clock there will be a debate on a motion in the name of Plaid Cymru entitled "The Future Structures of Government in Wales".

Proceedings on the Foreign Corporations Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the consolidation measures. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill.

Motion on the Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations.

THURSDAY 18 JULY—Remaining stages of the Child Support Bill *[Lords]*.

Motions to amend Standing Orders relating to departmental Select Committees.

Motion on parliamentary pensions.

Motions to approve new Standing Orders to establish the new Committee system for the management of services in the House and to provide in Standing Orders for a Broadcasting Committee.

FRIDAY 19 JULY—Debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House entitled "Wider Choice and Higher Standards in Schools".

MONDAY 22 JULY—Motion for the summer Adjournment.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 17 July at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows:

Committee A—Document No. 4658/91 relating to restriction on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations.

Committee B—Document No. 10445/90 relating to the oil supply situation.

I hope it will be for the convenience of the House to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the summer Adjournment on Thursday 25 July until Monday 14 October.

[Wednesday 17 July
Proceedings on the consolidation measures
Water Industry Bill [Lords]
Water Resources Bill [Lords]
Statutory Water Companies Bill [Lords]
Land Drainage Bill [Lords]
Water Consolidation (Consequential Provisions) Bill [Lords]
Deer Bill [Lords]
Statute Law Revision (Isle of Man) Bill [Lords]
Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill [Lords]
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Regulations.]

Dr. Cunningham: After a week of high security gaol breaks, bank collapses and scandals over the sale of the Property Services Agency, I have no doubt that Conservative Members will breathe a sigh of relief at the news that the House is to rise for the summer recess in two weeks' time. But before that occurs, and especially in view of the meetings of the Group of Seven, and the damning indictment of the OECD report on the failure of the Government's policies, will the Leader of the House assure us that we shall have an opportunity to debate the British economy, preferably in Government time? If we are not to have such a debate on economic affairs in Government time, may we be assured that we will have a Supply day so that Opposition Members can ensure that Parliament has that important debate before the summer recess?

Yet again, we have seen an obscene rise in salaries for chairmen and chief executives in privatised monopolies, a direct result of the Government's policies. But the cat was let out of the bad when the chairman of MANWEB said that Ministers knew in advance of those grotesque salary increases, taken completely at the mercy of electricity and water consumers the length and breadth of Britain. Is it not time to end the prevarication of the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers responsible and have a full debate in the House about the consequences of Government policy and their implications for consumer bills in those industries?

The Secretary of State for Defence has said, rightly, that he intends to make a statement about his review of the regimental system in the British Army before the House rises for the summer recess. May we, especially in view of the widespread interest in the future of the regimental system, which I believe extends to Members of all political parties—I know, for example, of the concern in Cumbria about the future of the King's Own Royal Border Regiment——

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): The hon. Gentleman should read Matthew Parris in *The Times*, too.

Dr. Cunningham: I recommend the hon. Lady and all her hon. Friends to read Matthew Parris about the toadies on the Government Benches.

May we have an assurance that that statement will be made in the Chamber of the House of Commons, so that we all have the opportunity to put questions to the Secretary of State for Defence?

Mr. MacGregor: I assure the hon. Gentleman that Conservative Members are happy to debate many of the matters that were debated during Prime Minister's questions. There is much vigour and enthusiasm among Conservative Members to probe the Labour party's policies, and it has been noticeable during recent Prime Minister's questions that Opposition Members dislike every moment of the probing of the Labour party's policies. Therefore, the desire to rise for the summer recess

is much stronger among Opposition Members, because they are anxious to avoid such continued probing of their policies. That is why, every time the matter is raised, they try to provide smokescreens and make sufficient noise for the responses not to be heard.

We would welcome a debate on the economy. The precise timing would be left to discussion between the usual channels. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have been having some discussions about the matter and we are anxious to ensure that the debate is taken in the best possible circumstances with the fullest attendance and with the appropriate speakers. We hope that, somehow or other, that can be fitted in before the summer recess. The hon. Gentleman knows of the pressure on the timetable, particularly with the date that I have announced for the rising of the House for the summer recess, but we are doing our best to ensure that we have a debate.

Privatisation could also be debated on that occasion. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have had a recent debate on the matter which is frequently raised in the House. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the position absolutely clear in the House this afternoon. The statement of the gentleman from MANWEB was not correct and a denial was issued thereafter.

The hon. Gentleman made a request for a statement on Army restructuring. I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence intends to make an oral statement in the House, if at all possible, before the House rises. The hon. Gentleman knows that when the House returns in October we shall have the usual debate on the Defence White Paper.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): From his past ministerial experience, my right hon. Friend will know of the obligation that section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986 lays on the Government. May we be told whether there will be an opportunity for a statement to be made before we rise on the Government's failure to honour that obligation?

Mr. MacGregor: I not only know of section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986, but I am extremely well aware of my right hon. Friend's interest in such matters. Ministers are now considering a detailed scientific background report. As my right hon. Friend knows, the issues are complicated. The review will be presented to Parliament as soon as possible. I cannot give an exact time, and he will know that no time limit is specified for presentation of the point in the 1986 Act.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) also has an interest in that matter, although perhaps of a slightly different nature.

I am sure that the Leader of the House would be the first to acknowledge that the consequences for individual investors, for companies and for local authorities, especially for small local authorities, of the failure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International are a serious matter. Given the time constraints, a debate may not be possible, but is it possible to have a statement so that matters can be aired? It is a serious matter and there are concerns among hon. Members of all parties. An opportunity to air those concerns properly would be most welcome.

Mr. MacGregor: Many of the issues are being aired thoroughly at present. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to the position of local authorities. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman also recognises that those who are pressing for compensation for personal and small business depositors of BCCI must realise that the deposit protection scheme is funded by contributions from the United Kingdom banking industry as a whole, so that the cost of any increase either in the £20,000 ceiling or in the 75 per cent. pay-out ratio would fall on the other United Kingdom banks, with implications either for their depositors or for their own small business customers. That point must be borne in mind.

I cannot promise a debate—indeed, I must rule out a debate in the time left. There is not sufficient Government time for a debate before the House rises. No doubt the matter can be raised in the debate on the economy, if we succeed in having it.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will my right hon. Friend tell me during which debate next week I shall be able to point out that every Labour Government in history, bar the 1924 Government, have increased the basic rate of income tax despite having promised not to do so at the preceding general election? Does he agree that if, by some misfortune, the Labour party was elected to government at the next general election, it would have massively to increase income tax, yet again, to pay for its enormous public spending plans?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the electorate will not give the Labour party that opportunity. We will make the point frequently in the House that the £35 billion extra expenditure to which Labour is already committed would have massive implications for tax. My hon. Friend may be able to deploy his arguments at greater length in the debate on Monday 22 July on the motion for the summer Adjournment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Leader of the House recall that two weeks ago I called on him to tell the Minister of Agriculture, to make a statement about the livelihood of two farmers in my constituency who are not allowed to milk their cows and now have no income? We have never had such a statement, although there are 25 other farms in the locality. Why does the Minister of Agriculture, refuse to compensate those farmers? The Government talk about the citizens charter and compensation for people, yet they do not have the guts and decency to pay the farmers in that locality. Why do they not get on with it?

Mr. MacGregor: I know of the hon. Gentleman's concern about the matter, and he knows that a full statement was given when the initial announcement was made. I referred to that at some length in the House. Further explanations have been given in reply to parliamentary questions. A research programme is being devised for the two farms concerned and other farms in the vicinity. These are complex matters, as I know because I have had to deal with similar issues in relation to rhizomania and other matters. The details of the research programme for the two farms have yet to be decided. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will want to make a statement when he has completed those details. I believe that the farms were visited recently.

It is entirely fair for the hon. Gentleman to raise this point, not only in the context of compensation but in other

[Mr. MacGregor]

contexts. It is indeed a serious issue. Let me assure him again—and assure everyone living in the area—that it has been made clear that, of the 27 farms in the Bolsover area that were monitored, only the two whose milk is no longer going into the public supply showed dioxin levels that required action.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): May I refer my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 1103?

[That this House welcomes the decision of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in authorising certain of their officials to meet with the legal representatives of the injured Grenadiers; and looks forward to fruitful negotiations yielding a just and humane solution.]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987, although very well intentioned, has two major deficiencies? First, it makes no provision for flexibility; it does not allow the Secretary of State for Defence to make any ex gratia payments. Secondly, it makes no provision for any service man who sues the Government to have full discovery of documents. Those two facts add up to a great injustice, which is continuing every day of the week. Please may we have a debate, as a matter of urgency, to put the Act right?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that there will be an opportunity for a debate in Government time on a specific Act before the House rises. As for the early-day motion, I know that the meeting between officials and legal representatives of the three guardsmen led to a full and useful discussion of the case. My hon. Friend mentioned the provision of information. The MOD officials provided the guardsmen's lawyers with some further information, and undertook to provide other information as requested.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): We may have only 10 parliamentary days left before a general election is called. Meanwhile, 1 million people are missing from the electoral register. In the course of those 10 days, should we not discuss the position, and establish whether anything can be done to restore full and genuine electoral registration? If Conservative Members think that there is nothing wrong with the current state of affairs, let me remind them that this House introduced the universal franchise, and that this Government have helped to destroy it.

Mr. MacGregor: I told the hon. Gentleman that I would give him the same reply as before if he asked for a debate on the matter again. Let me add to that reply, however. There is no connection between the number of people who register for voting purposes and the number who register for the community charge. By fomenting such a view, the hon. Gentleman is doing an injustice to those who might wish to register for electoral purposes. He is creating the wrong impression—just as Opposition Members are doing when they encourage people not to pay their community charge.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate next week on the important question of minimum values on the export of horses and ponies after 1992? Will he bear in mind that the matter is likely to be settled by the Council of Ministers, perhaps as early as September? Is it not time that the House debated the issue, which is disturbing the nation's conscience more than any other issue connected with animal welfare?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that it will be possible to find Government time for a debate before the House rises, although my hon. Friend will have other opportunities to raise the matter. Let me assure him, however, that I have no doubt that the Government—including my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—know the views of the House full well. I have seen extensive constituency correspondence, and thorough replies from my right hon. Friend the Minister expressing the Government's sympathy and determination to continue to press to get the policy right.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Of all people, the Leader of the House should understand the importance of the agriculture industry and of the negotiations taking place in the Common Market. Can he guarantee that these matters will be brought before the House, either in the form of a statement or preferably in a full-scale debate? Is he now in a position to say when and how these events will be reported back to the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I imagine that the hon. Gentleman has in mind the MacSharry proposals, phase 2, to reform the common agricultural policy. As he knows, the Commission's latest ideas have been published in a lengthy document that will need to be studied in detail before it can be commented upon in depth. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows already that the Government have made it clear that we shall continue to resist firmly all suggestions that would increase the cost of the CAP unacceptably, that would be incompatible with increasing agricultural efficiency and, above all, that would discriminate against the United Kingdom. That has been made absolutely clear, as well as our desire to press strongly for closer integration of agricultural and environmental policies, on which I believe firmly that the United Kingdom has been taking the lead in the Council for a considerable time.

The Agriculture Council will have a preliminary discussion on 15 and 16 July and will commence detailed discussions at the September Council. My guess is that the discussions will continue for a considerable time. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall arrange a suitable opportunity to debate these matters.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): When may we have a further statement or debate on the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? The Leader of the House knows the catastrophic effects that the closure will have on some local authorities, investors and depositors as well as on businesses. He will also know that the situation is developing every day. We heard rumours that the Governor of the Bank of England was going to fly out of the country to meet the sheikh of Abu Dhabi, and that further discussions were taking place.

Is this not exactly the sort of issue that deserves to be debated when we know that there is a time limit, which is the date that the petition is to be presented to the High Court for the winding up of the bank? There is no point in debating the issue after that. We can do nothing to

alleviate the suffering of these people once that is done. May we have a further statement and a debate on this very important matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already stated the position regarding a debate. If it seemed appropriate at any point, I would certainly discuss with my right hon. Friends whether it would be possible for a statement to be made, but we have to judge when, and if, that is appropriate.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): My right hon. Friend stated that the House will rise on Thursday 25 July for the long recess and, by convention, has announced the business for Monday 22 July. That leaves undeclared the business for Tuesday and Wednesday 23 and 24 July. May I make a very modest suggestion: that the Tuesday should bear the more onerous business and the Wednesday the more optional?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not know what my right hon. Friend succeeded in doing in the last week before the summer recess when he was in my position, but he will certainly be aware of some of the pressures. I can assure him that Tuesday's business will be onerous. I am fairly certain—though this largely depends on what returns to us from the other place—that Wednesday will be a long and onerous day as well. I have suggested for some time time that the idea that the House is running out of business—a rumour that was propagated in June—is absolute and total nonsense. We can see, with the pressure on the timetable during the next fortnight, how much we shall have to deal with.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it might be helpful to have a wide-ranging debate on fundamental beliefs so that we can establish how many of the beliefs that the Leader of the Opposition previously held have now been jettisoned? My right hon. Friend will have read the report on the front page of *The Times* today that the Leader of the Opposition and his wife have not renewed their membership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He will further recall that in 1981 the Leader of the Opposition said that nuclear disarmament was one of the fundamental beliefs that he would never desert. How many more of these fundamental beliefs is he going to desert?

Mr. MacGregor: In the earlier exchanges on Prime Minister's questions, when it was suggested by one of my hon. Friends that the Opposition seemed to be changing their position on the nuclear question, I was interested to hear the response from the Opposition Front Bench to the effect that there had been no change at all.

Dr. Cunningham: That was three years ago.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman has now confirmed that the change was made three years ago and that there has been no change since. I am sure that my hon. Friends will find that extremely interesting, because there has been a great deal of probing of the Opposition's position on that question in recent months and a great deal of fudging in response. Therefore, I think that my hon. Friend is making a fair point. There will be an opportunity——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours Workington): Is this in order?

Mr. MacGregor: I am totally in order because I am dealing with the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay). There will be opportunities to debate this matter when the House returns after the recess because, when, as I have said, we shall be having the usual debate on the defence White Paper.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate earlier than the debate on the defence White Paper? We could discuss the United Nations and the Government's role in supporting it. We could also discuss the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the 139 nations of our planet which have taken the decision not to manufacture or deploy nuclear weapons. We could discuss whether we should maintain the indefensible position of threatening to exterminate half the world through the possession of nuclear weapons or support and join the vast majority of the world's nations which will not have nuclear weapons. We could then decide which is the most sensible policy to pursue.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on one point. If it had been possible, I would have liked to have a debate on the defence estimates——

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): On the defence cuts.

Mr. MacGregor: I would have liked to have the debate on the defence White Paper before October for a number of reasons, one of which is that it is clear that there are great divisions within the Opposition and it would have enabled us to establish that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) clearly disagrees with the views of his Front-Bench spokesmen—at least in so far as we can establish what those views are.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): The question of clause 52, relating to building societies, of the Finance Bill was raised during Prime Minister's Question Time. Will the Leader of the House consider a new dimension to the long-running debate between the Government and the building societies, in that the Leeds Permanent building society has now applied to the court to test the legality of the Government's propositions? In those circumstances, would it not be appropriate if clause 52 were to be deferred until we could ascertain whether the Government are entitled to engage in what the building societies contend is double taxation, although I appreciate that the Government take an opposite view?

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly the selection of clauses, new clauses and amendments for debate on Monday and possibly Tuesday is for you, Mr. Speaker; I would not wish to comment on that. However, clause 52 was debated thoroughly in Committee, and I doubt whether it makes sense to withdraw it from the Finance Bill now.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Is the Leader of the House aware of early-day motion 1035, which draws attention to and expresses alarm about the disruption in the licensed trade?

[That this House views with alarm the disruption now occurring in the licensed trade; deplores the fact that many tenant licensees with long experience of serving the public are being forced either to accept long leases at extortionate rents and with full repairing liabilities or to leave the trade with little hope of finding new employment; notes that beer

[Mr. Stan Crowther]

prices have been substantially increased while the market share held by the four biggest brewery companies has risen to almost 70 per cent., thus negating the aim of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to provide more consumer choice; and therefore calls on the Government (a) to instruct the Director General of Fair Trading to review the position immediately, (b) to introduce a minimum level of compensation for displaced tenants above that provided in the Landlord and Tenant Act and (c) to introduce a form of independent arbitration for the assessment of fair rents.]

It asks the Government to take remedial measures and now has the support of 73 right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that the legislation introduced after the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report has failed in its objective of providing a better deal for customers? It has certainly not provided better security for tenant licensees and most assuredly has upset the Conservative party's traditional friends in the brewing industry? In view of that, will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on those matters before the summer Adjournment?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can arrange for such a debate in Government time. The hon. Gentleman talked of a debate before the summer Adjournment. The subject could be raised in the motion for the summer Adjournment, and there may be other opportunities as well.

On the substance of the early-day motion, the hon. Gentleman will know that the Landlord and Tenant (Licensed Premises) Act 1990 was introduced by the Government and ensures that pub tenants are entitled to the same security of tenure and statutory minimum compensation as other business tenants.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The Leader of the House must be aware of the numberous complaints about the lack of real democracy in the governance of Northern Ireland. Therefore, as I put to him in the debate yesterday, pending the establishment of a Northern Ireland assembly, will he establish now a Select Committee on Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: The position on the Select Committees for Northern Ireland and for Scotland has been discussed a number of times. I have nothing to add.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the fact that on Thursday we shall consider motions to amend the Standing Orders on departmental Select Committees, but may I take it that it will be possible to move motion No. 41, which has been tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and other hon. Members?

Will it be possible to have a debate, even in the spillover period, on the defence White Paper to allow us to make a plea for the uniting and maintaining of the Queen's Irish Hussars?

Mr. MacGregor: The debate on the defence White Paper will be in the spillover period. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will be able to make a statement on Army restructuring before the House rises, when such matters could be discussed. I hope that the motions on Standing Orders will implement all, but possibly the majority, of the Procedure Committee's recommendations on Select Committees.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): My right hon. Friend said that business is likely to be heavy on 24 July. May I remind him that that is my wife's birthday?

Will my right hon. Friend consider arranging a debate on the exchange rate mechanism? It is nine months since we joined, and several eminent economic commentators such as Anatole Kaletsky of *The Times* and Andrew Alexander of the *Daily Mail*, and economic academics such as Professor Patrick Minford of Liverpool university, feel that it is having an adverse effect on our prospects of recovering from the recession and for lowering interest rates.

Mr. MacGregor: I apologise to my hon. Friend's wife. It is not the first time that we have had heavy business on the birthdays of hon. Members' wives, including mine. My hon. Friend will be able to give his wife dinner in the House, which has excellent facilities.

On the point of substance that he raised——

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman did not say anything of substance.

Mr. MacGregor: The point of policy substance that my hon. Friend made would be appropriate for a debate on the economy. As I said to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), I hope that we shall have such a debate in the last week before the recess. I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's request about 24 July in considering when that debate should be held.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): As today is a much more auspicious occasion—my birthday—will the Leader of the House, who apparently is in a good mood, be kind enough to answer two questions, if you, Mr. Speaker, will allow me to ask them?

First, despite what the right hon. Gentleman has said, may we have a debate on the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? Is he aware of the enormous hardship that it has caused ordinary people, including the Oulik family in my constituency, who stand to lose nearly all their life savings? Surely we should at least have a statement, and will the Leader of the House undertake to talk to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about that?

Secondly, will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement on the unworthy and indefensible 63 per cent. increase in the salary of the chairman of East Midlands Electricity, when its staff's salary increases were held down to 8·9 per cent.? Everyone in the Leicester area considers that to be a bad precedent in an industry that should not have been taken out of public ownership.

Mr. MacGregor: I disagree with the hon. and learned Gentleman about the implications of the privatisation of electricity boards for the industry and for consumers. It will benefit both.

The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that I have already responded to both his other questions. I understand the consequences of the collapse of BCCI for families and businesses, but, as I said earlier, there is no

room for a debate in Government time. If and when it is appropriate, I shall discuss the possibility of a statement with my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends—and, for all I know, some members of the Opposition—believe that no more technical assistance should be given to the Soviet Union by the G7 countries until there is genuine democracy, genuine economic reform, genuine rule of law and a genuine reduction in the conventional arms build-up in that country? Will there be an opportunity next week when President Gorbachev will be in London for us to make that clear statement to him in the presence of representatives from the G7 countries?

Mr. MacGregor: That question does not relate to the business of the House, but I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend's comment will have been noted. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will, I expect, make a statement on the outcome of the G7 talks.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): In view of the decision taken by the United States Government to lift sanctions against South Africa, may we have a statement next week to the effect that the Government will not follow the American example until a new constitution is in place in South Africa to guarantee the right to vote for all South African people?

Mr. MacGregor: I believe that there will be a widespread welcome not only for that decision, but for the recent decision of various sports councils to readmit South Africa to the international sporting arena. However, I cannot promise a debate or a statement on these issues.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): It is welcome news that the Secretary of State for Defence is to make a statement on Army reorganisation before the House rises, but can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that there will be sufficient time to question the Secretary of State? Last time, there was not sufficient time for many hon. Members with regimental interests to ask questions, and I was unable to raise the issue of the future of the Royal Anglian Regiment. In view of the pressure that is being brought to bear, would not it be better to have a debate on the White Paper before the House rises? Is it not absolutely essential for the world, in its present state, to know that the Government's nuclear defence policy commands a majority in the House so that the issue can be put to rest?

Mr. MacGregor: On the second point, I have already said that I wish we could have time for a debate on these issues before the House rises because I am keen to solve the conundrum of the Opposition's nuclear defence policy and to contrast it with ours. I do not think that it is necessary to have a debate for the country to know of the big differences between us on that issue.

My hon. Friend's first point illustrates the difficulties of the past two weeks. There is a lot of business to be covered, which is why I said that there will be a number of very heavy days. However, the amount of time given to an oral statement is a matter not for me but for Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House find time before the recess to arrange for further discussion on the "fortress Europe" statement on political refugees which was made by the Home Secretary last week, so that we can, in general, answer some of the rabid comments of the Tory right to the effect that Britain is being swamped by people from an alien culture and specifically raise an answer that I received from a Home Office Minister on Monday? That answer showed that in 20 of the past 27 years more people have left the country than have entered it, and that since 1964 there has been a net emigration of 786,000 people from the United Kingdom. Does not that put into context the false justification for denying and tightening the rights of political refugees?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend's statement last week was not on immigration or emigration but was specifically about asylum. His statement was very clear.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): My right hon. Friend announced that there was to be yet another debate on Wales next week. Does he ever reflect on the difficulties that hon. Members have in raising matters relating to parts of the United Kingdom that get a much smaller per capita handout from central Government than do Wales and Scotland? Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that the county of Kent faces extraordinary pressures, partly because the channel tunnel is now finished? We are now linked to France and, in many ways, we are already being treated, and hope to continue to be treated, as a Euro-region. The volume of traffic per mile is increasing faster in Kent than in almost any other part of the United Kingdom. There is a whole range of issues that it would be good to debate in the House. Can my right hon. Friend see his way to providing us with an opportunity to do that?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can see a way to providing an opportunity to debate those specific issues before the House rises, although I know that they have already been raised quite often. My hon. Friend will know that next week's debate on Welsh matters is to be held on an Opposition day, and that the subject has been chosen by Plaid Cymru.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Leader of the House says that we "might" have a statement on BCCI "when and if" it is appropriate. May I tell him that the local authorities think that it is appropriate now? They expected a statement to be made to Parliament today. May we have that statement on Monday, and may we have an assurance that a statement will not be made tomorrow because, too often, important statements are slipped through on Fridays when it is mostly London and home counties Members who are present and when many of us have had to go back to Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and all parts of the United Kingdom, with a travelling time of five, six or seven hours? May we have that statement as a matter of urgency—particularly as, in the north-west of England, many authorities of all political persuasions are affected?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can add to what I have already said about our making a statement when and if it is appropriate to do so. I note what the hon. Gentleman says about statements on Fridays, but I emphasise that it is sometimes appropriate to have statements on Fridays.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): The Leader of the House will be aware that the resort of Hunstanton in my constituency today took delivery of the

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

highly prestigious blue flag award for being one of the cleanest and best resorts in the country. May I ask my right hon. Friend for his advice? I should like to pay tribute to Kings Lynn and West Norfolk borough council, to Hunstanton town council, to Anglian Water and to all those in the town of Hunstanton who have worked so hard to achieve the award. When will I have the chance to pay tribute to those bodies and to discuss the question of improving beaches throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has already done so, and, as a Norfolk man myself, I should like to add to the tributes that he has paid in respect of Hunstanton beach. May I give him another favourable reply by pointing out that tomorrow there is to be a debate on the environment in which he could embellish the points that he has already made.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will there be a statement or a debate next week on the G7 economic summit and its outcome, with particular reference to third-world debt—the system whereby the poorest countries subsidise the banking systems of western Europe, north America and Japan? It is time that the G7 summit stopped the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, wrote off the debts and arranged for changes in the trading system so that commodity prices paid to the poorest people around the world for their products rise instead of continuing to decline. Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that, the longer the system continues, the more schools and hospitals will be closed in poor countries, the worse the health of the people of those countries will become and the more damage will be done to their environment? This is a serious matter and should be debated in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that there will be a statement on the outcome of the summit, although I cannot, at this stage, say exactly when.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on the usual courtesies in the proceedings of this House? May I draw his attention to the statement made earlier by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who referred to a number of Conservative Members as toads and drew attention to an article by Mr. Matthew Parris in *The Times*? Will my right hon. Friend remind Opposition Members that Mr. Toad and his friends defeated the weasels and drove them out of the house? Some of us would be proud to be toads.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend's point speaks for itself. It was an answer and not a question.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Leader of the House reflect on the way in which we are handling the business of defence? He has said that we will not have a debate on the White Paper until the spillover period. Therefore, there will be three months from the publication of the White Paper until the House discusses it. That is not the normal procedure. The normal procedure would be to discuss a White Paper very soon after its publication.

Some very serious issues in Scotland require answers on the Floor of the House, and they should not wait for the spillover period, especially those in relation to the safety of the Trident system which has been reported upon extensively by the Select Committee on Defence. We need a decision and a statement on the future of naval bases, including the base at Rosyth. Although it is perfectly reasonable to have disputes about such matters across the Floor of the House, if the Leader of the House is really anxious to discuss the matter, should we not have a longer period before the recess? There is ample time, and a recess of a couple of months or so is a bit of a nonsense. The Leader of the House should know better.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman understands why the White Paper was later this year. He will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave evidence to the Select Committee only yesterday. He will also know that we had two full days' debates on defence matters only recently. We therefore need some time to consider the matters in the White Paper and the points about Army restructuring on which I have been pressed today. I am under great pressure from hon. Members on both sides of the House for the House to rise at the time that I have announced. It is therefore not possible to have the debate on the defence White Paper until we come back.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend probably read in *The Daily Telegraph* today that Saddam Hussein has been responsible for the assassination of 14 of his generals over the past few weeks, and that the United Nations team of observers in Iraq is having particular problems. The Pentagon has now said that satellites have observed more than 10 depositories of nuclear material. In the same breath, the Pentagon is preparing a strike force. Before everything happens again, may we talk the matter through before the recess?

Mr. MacGregor: I will convey my hon. Friend's concerns to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that I fully support the request for an early debate or for a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence on the position of the injured Grenadier guardsmen? Is he aware that the meeting the other day between the solicitors representing the soldiers and Ministry of Defence officials was welcome? I believe that there will be progress and that there will be proper compensation for those who have been crippled for life. However, if that progress is not made, may we have a statement as quickly as possible about the matter, certainly before the House rises for the recess? There is tremendous concern in the west midlands about the issue and about Sean Povey.

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern about the matter because he has raised it on a number of occasions. I cannot say whether there will be developments before the House rises. However, I will convey yet again to my right hon. Friend the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised this afternoon.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Earlier this week the Civil Aviation Authority published proposals that threaten the viability of the express rail link at Heathrow airport. If that scheme is abandoned, it will cause great harm to my constituents, to the travelling public, and to

British aviation interests in general. By the time that I have sat down, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be left in no doubt about my views. Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House organise a debate before the House rises so that the rest of the House may make it crystal clear to the Secretary of State for Transport that the proposals are absolute nonsense and that once again they show that the CAA does not understand the economic facts of life?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, the proposals were advanced not by the Government but by the CAA. I am sure that he will make his views known during the consultation process.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Is the Leader of the House aware that grave concern was expressed last night in another place by the chairman of British Coal about the behaviour of the two big generating companies? Will he find time to discuss the problems that have been caused by the privatisation of one electricity company and the creation of two electricity duopolies—that is what they are; they act as monopolies—which are now screwing down coal prices so far that there will be drastic closures in the coal industry unless something is done soon?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not yet had the opportunity to read the comments made last night in another place, but I will draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): If the Prime Minister totally changed the Government's policy on our independent nuclear deterrent next week, the Opposition and the House would rightly expect him to make a statement in the House. Therefore, perhaps not before the recess but during it, will my right hon. Friend, in his capacity as Leader of the House, devote his energies to considering the possibility of introducing a procedure whereby if the Leader of the Opposition, who receives an official salary for that job, changes his policy, he can be asked to account for it in the House?

We have heard the shadow Leader of the House say this afternoon, sotto voce, that Labour's defence policy was changed three years ago, but we need to have that on the record. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if anybody who receives an official salary similar to that received by a Minister and thus has the responsibilities that go with it changes his policy on privatisation, nationalisation or nuclear deterrence, that person should be required to subject himself to a debate in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I can assure my hon. Friend that, in an appropriate debate, such a person would certainly be subjected to a great deal of probing on his or her position. There has been considerable confusion about the Opposition's nuclear policy for some months. We have heard this afternoon—it has been confirmed by those on the Opposition Front Bench—that there is no change in the Opposition's policy, so I am afraid that there is still no change in the confusion.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): May I press the Leader of the House again to find time for a statement on the increasingly complex issue of sanctions against South Africa? Although, in common with many others, I welcome South Africa's readmission to the international Olympics and to cricket because it has integrated its sports structures for the Olympic sports and for cricket, that has not yet happened in rugby or in the other sports that are still organised on racial lines. By backing President Bush's almost obscene haste in lifting economic sanctions while blacks do not have the vote in South Africa, the Government risk derailing the whole process of reform that has been gathering momentum over the past year. Does the Leader of the House recognise those concerns, and will he find time for a debate on those vital issues?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that I do not think that it will be possible to find time to debate that issue before the House rises. The Government's position on sanctions is clear, and has been clear for some time.

Mr. David Shaw (Bury, South): May we have a debate next week on leasehold reform to give the Government the opportunity to refer to reports in the press today that they are shortly to announce the introduction of the commonhold system of land tenure, which would remove many of the problems that my constituents face because of impossible and difficult landlords who are making their lives a complete misery? Can my right hon. Friend give us any hint about what the Government might say in the next few days?

Mr. MacGregor: Although there will not be time for a debate, I assure my hon. Friend that there will be a statement shortly, which I believe he will very much welcome.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I advise the Leader of the House that I am a Member of the Council of Europe and thoroughly enjoy the experience of our debates at Strasbourg, Paris and other places of hardship around Europe? I attend the Council of Europe as part of a delegation which is sent there by the House of Commons. It would therefore be appropriate if we had the opportunity to give an account in this House of what we have been doing in the Council of Europe on behalf of all hon. Members—*[Interruption.]*—and often at great pressure to our health and livelihoods.

When did we last have a debate in Government time on the working of the Council of Europe? If the Leader of the House cannot say that, will he give us an assurance that we shall have an early debate when we return from the recess so that we can give an account of what we have been doing on behalf of the whole House?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall have to look into the record. I cannot give an assurance that there will be a debate in Government time—although I am sure that the entire House would be interested to know what the hon. Gentleman has been up to.

Mr. Skinner: He got a new jacket last Christmas.

Mr. MacGregor: The jacket has certainly come from somewhere. I have noticed that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is never short of opportunities to tell us what he has been up to in various pursuits. Undoubtedly he will find an opportunity at some point to explain what he has been up to.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I support the request of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) for a debate on political refugees? In such a debate, we could consider one particularly unworthy

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

group of political refugees—the Militant Tendency in the Labour party. It would give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to tell us whether he believes that he is eligible.

Mr. MacGregor: Many of us believe that it is time that the Leader of the Opposition made clear his position on those of his colleagues who are members of Militant or who support Militant. Therefore, my hon. Friend makes a fair point.

Consolidated Fund Bill (Adjournment Debates)

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund Bill on Monday 22 July.

Members should submit their subjects to my office not later than 10 pm on Wednesday 17 July. A list showing the subjects and times will be published the following day. Normally the time allotted will not exceed one and a half hours, but I propose to exercise a discretion to allow one or two debates to continue for rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours.

Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different Members whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will be shown on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

Orders of the Day

British Railways Board (Finance) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is primarily a technical measuree, but the debate on its Second Reading gives the House an opportunity to spend a relatively unusual amount of time debating the railways in the United Kingdom. The Government are delighted that this opportunity should be available. It is also provides us with an opportunity to probe in the kindliest and gentlest way the views of Her Majesty's Opposition on railways policy. Clearly, over the months, a certain ambiguity, dubiety and equivocation have developed about exactly what those views are.

In my later remarks I shall seek to entice the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) to abandon his customary shyness and speak to the House in a clear and unequivocal way so that we and the country can be better informed about the Labour party's views.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Secretary of State must make his own judgment about whether I am a shy Member. Is he aware that, in the latest National Opinion Poll survey, when people were asked whether they would trust the Labour party's or the Government's policy for transport in our country, 50 per cent. said that they would trust Labour and 29 per cent. said that they would trust the Tories? That is a sufficent answer to the Secretary of State's suggestion that there is confusion about our policies.

Mr. Rifkind: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is so interested in opinion polls. I presume that he was equally impressed by the opinion poll in yesterday's *Guardian*, which showed that most people wish to see British Rail privatised and that 23 per cent. of Labour voters believe that the railways would improve if they were privatised. As the hon. Gentleman has just confessed that he is an implicit believer in everything that the opinion polls say, privatisation will undoubtedly become part of the policy conversion that the Labour party is slowly and grudgingly moving towards.

Mr. Prescott: This is the last time I shall intervene in the Secretary of State's speech. I do not want to debate this important issue now, but the poll in *The Guardian* also showed that the people surveyed thought that privatisation had been pretty disastrous in other areas so far, but that they felt that it might work better for the railways. So their experience did not seem to fit in with the privatisation that they wanted.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will have to start off by trying to persuade 23 per cent. of his own supporters that the Labour party's policy, which is hostile to privatisation, deserves their approval——

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The right hon. and learned Gentleman just said that we have not got one.

Mr. Rifkind: The Labour party certainly has many policies, but they are mutually inconsistent and they vary from spokesman to spokesman and from month to month. No one would dream of accusing the Labour party of being short of policies—that would be grossly unfair.

The Bill is a technical measure which amends the statutory provisions relating to the indebtedness of the British Railways Board. The first part of the Bill increases the limit on the borrowing powers of British Rail from the current figure of £1·1 billion to about £3 billion and it enables the Secretary of State to propose by affirmative order a further maximum of £5 billion. There are similar provisions with regard to grants under the public service obligation which also propose that the figure in question should not exceed £3 billion, with an opportunity to increase that sum by affirmative order to £5 billion.

For many years, for the railways and for other nationalised industries, there have been statutory limits which determine their maximum borrowing and grants at any given moment. Unless those limits are regularly increased, British Rail, like other nationalised industries, would be in the unusual position of having Government approval to fund a certain level of expenditure without being able to use that approval because it would conflict with the technical statutory limit laid down in the legislation.

It is especially important now to enable British Rail to go forward with the large investment programme that it has undertaken, based on heavy Government support. That investment programme usually funded by a combination of internal receipts and of borrowing, but the proportion of internal receipts falls if British Rail goes through a difficult period such as it has been in for the past 18 months.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Why does it take me longer to travel on the west coast line from Carlisle to London today than it did 12 years ago when I was first elected to Parliament? Why do trains invariably break down on that route? Why are trains often late? Why are there repeated signalling failures? There are broken seats; there is broken equipment; there are toilets that do not work; the carriages are overcrowded. What has gone wrong? Every time I travel on the line people complain to conductors and drivers. When they finally get to London they find that the escalator at Euston station does not work and has not worked for seven weeks——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Interventions should be short and to the point. The hon. Gentleman is not making a speech at this stage.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's remarks provide confirmation of the Government's view that the last Labour Government were foolish to cut investment in the railways, and that the present Government were right to increase it.

British Rail's annual figures, released last week, show that it went through a difficult period—as did many other companies—during the recession. Not so much because of railway activity but primarily because of a dramatic fall in the income that it would usually receive from property assets, it has not been possible for BR to fund from such receipts the proportion of the investment that it would have hoped to fund. Without the Bill, some time later this year, British Rail would have found itself with Government approval to continue its investment programme, but unable to do so because the borrowing requirement for that purpose would have taken it over the statutory limit.

Essentially, that is all that the Bill is about, and that is why it is appropriate to ask the House to allow these limits to be increased. It does not mean that British Rail will be getting borrowing or grant powers of £3,000 million at any given moment. The limits are intended to last for several years and, as in the past, future investment levels will be determined as part of the public expenditure survey programme.

Although it was a matter of some sadness that British Rail announced a loss of some £40 million last week, I found it particularly pleasing, and it was refreshing, that even last year, during what was undoubtedly an extremely difficult financial year for British Rail, two of its major businesses—InterCity and Bulk Freight—continued to make a profit. When the Government consider the likely course of privatisation in what we hope will be the not-too-distant future, we shall find it encouraging that, even during an economic recession, both those businesses demonstrated their capacity to make a profit.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In considering the public sector obligation grant, will the Secretary of State have regard to the complaints of the Transport Users Consultative Committee that the network on which the grant is being paid has effectively been reduced because the levels of service on many of the lines are far below what they were when the direction was given? In effect, that is closure by the back door, with no recourse to the Secretary of State or to a public inquiry, of a number of important rural lines.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, in any given year, at any time, some services are increased and some are reduced and some lines are opened or re-opened. The public service obligation grant applies to the entirety of these services. While the hon. Gentleman is entitled to point to examples of reduced services, I find it encouraging that, over the past few years, there has been a substantial net increase in the totality of services offered by British Rail.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I am still waiting for my right hon. and learned Friend to convince me that the passenger will benefit from privatisation. Which country is he using as a model to provide guidance because this policy has been successfully undertaken there?

Mr. Rifkind: I am impressed by the fact that the policy of privatising the railways is being put forward by other Governments than the British Government, who have the support of the public as expressed in the opinion poll. It is also the policy of the Japanese Government, who are further ahead on these matters than we are. The Dutch Government have said that they are proposing to privatise the Dutch railways. The chairman of the German railways —the Deutsche Bundesbahn—was reported as saying in a recent speech that privatisation might be necessary for the German railways. The European Commission and the Council of Transport Ministers have taken the lead in ending state-controlled railway monopolies. Therefore, privatisation is part of an international trend which is very much to be welcomed.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I am sure that the Secretary of State wil be aware that in Japan, a series of

[Dr. Kim Howells]

regional monopolies, plus a freight-carrying monopoly, have been created. Neither I nor anybody else who has investigated this matter has yet found a privatised railway system that involves real competition of the sort that I assume the Government would like to see. The problem about privatisation can be put simply. How does one make one train pass another on the same line? It is impossible.

Mr. Rifkind: The example that the hon. Gentleman used is absurd, as he is obviously aware. He must appreciate two things. First, competition can often mean two trains going from one destination to another by different routes. For example, one can get from London to Birmingham in two ways and from Edinburgh to Glasgow in two ways—one by ScotRail and one by InterCity. It may be that one day these two services will compete on price, perhaps under separate ownership, and that would be genuine competition.

There is also an opportunity for new entrants into the railway industry to provide services either for freight or passengers, which currently are reserved by law to British Rail or can be conducted only with the approval of British Rail. There is a multitude of ways in which greater choice can be introduced on the railways. It is for that reason that not just in this country, but in the European Community, such a policy is increasingly being pursued. I shall return to those matters in a few moments.

The Government's policy is to seek greater use of the railways, primarily for freight but also for passengers. It is appropriate to do that not only in the interests of the railways, but in the interests of the motorists and those who use our roads. To the extent that it is possible to encourage greater use of railways for freight, that will help to relieve congestion elsewhere.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I am interested in the theme that my right hon. and learned Friend is beginning to enunciate. Is he aware that there was concern in my constituency when the Speedlink service was withdrawn from Taunton Cider, as it was feared that that would result in lorries using the narrow roads of Norton Fitzwarren. Fortunately, Tigerail has taken on most of that service, which I welcome. I hope that it is successful.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any proposals to enable the railways to take more freight away from lorries that use environmentally sensitive roads——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are becoming speeches. I shall do my best to call the hon. Gentleman to make a speech. Will he please confine his intervention to a few comments?

Mr. Nicholson: There will also be a problem with bridges, which will cost Somerset a vast amount to improve if heavy lorries use them.

Mr. Rifkind: I reassure my hon. Friend on both counts. He may have noted my announcement two or three weeks ago on section 8 environmental grants, which substantially improved the entitlement to grants that can be paid to those who are currently using country roads, environmentally sensitive roads or other roads not designed for the carriage of heavy freight. They can be much more generously assisted to transfer that freight to the railways, which I am sure my hon. Friend would welcome.

On my hon. Friend's point about Speedlink, it was difficult to fault British Rail for deciding to close an operation which, on a turnover of £45 million, was expected this year to make a loss of £40 million. It was a great relief that BR negotiated with its former customers to ensure that 70 per cent. of that load would continue to be carried by rail. As my hon. Friend mentioned, new operators are also being invited to take over part of that responsibility.

Investment is a crucial part of the Government's objective of encouraging the development of our rail infrastructure. There is now more investment in our rail infrastructure than at any time since the days of Dr. Beeching. It is not simply a question of providing global sums, which can sometimes sound impressive, without indicating what that means in reality. However, the reality is impressive, and the investment is being used to improve the quality of service both for those who depend on the railways and those who would like to use them.

The figures are impressive. Currently, the approval given to British Rail for investments, and the rolling stock that is being manufactured, amount to no fewer than 1,361 passengers coaches, at various stages of manufacture. Some 112 new locomotives are also being manufactured. Network SouthEast, which operates in a part of the country that is often believed to be most dependent upon elderly stock, has no fewer than 895 passenger coaches in various stages of manufacture. They will transform the quality of travel for those who use its services in the months and years to come.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Is not a good example of what my right hon. and learned Friend just explained—and for which the people of north Kent are grateful—the introduction of the new Networker units on the north Kent line, which from the autumn will bring relief to commuters from Gravesend and elsewhere?

Mr. Rifkind: We were pleased to give British Rail the investment approval that it required for that service. As my hon. Friend rightly said, it was clearly an important and urgent priority.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): There has been a substantial delay in the introduction of the Networker coaches, and that has been a considerable disappointment to my constituents. Have the bugs in the manufacture of those coaches been eradicated?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand that the first coaches will be introduced in September. It is always regrettable when manufacturing delays retard the arrival of new rolling stock. However, it is clear that my hon. Friend's constituents will have the benefit of that investment in the near future.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, who has given way many times. Will he say something about electrification? He is aware that he is not exactly the most popular figure in Nottingham because of his roads policy. Might he try to reclaim some of his lost popularity by suggesting that the midlands line to Nottingham could be electrified?

Mr. Rifkind: I appreciate that in some parts of my hon. Friend's constituency the preferred line of route for a particular road was not greeted with enormous rapture.

However, I understand that, even among those closest to my hon. Friend, there are differences of view about the preferred line of route. If there can be differences of view in the heart of my hon. Friend's constituency, it cannot be surprising that our announcement had mixed reactions.

Individual projects for electrification are matters for British Rail. It analyses the various proposals and then comes to us if it believes that an investment can be justified. The level of investment——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware of the proposal for the overhead electrification of the Leeds-Bradford and the Aire Valley railways. That proposal has been forwarded to his Department and it has been approved. Unfortunately, there is no approval for the coaches and the rolling stock. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman will appreciate, one is no good without the other. At the current rate of progress, if there is much further delay the cost of the rolling stock will increase. As the Government want, I hope, maximum value for money, will he make a statement urgently—preferably tonight—giving authority for the passenger transport authority to go ahead with the purchase of the rolling stock?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand that there has been some change in the proposal regarding either the leasing or the purchase of the relevant rolling stock, and that will have to be given the fullest consideration.

The level of investment is crucial to the prospects for improving our railways, and investment is now at a higher level than at any time for 30 years. The opening of the channel tunnel will be significant. In the past, the prospects for encouraging freight to transfer to rail have been relatively limited. As many hon. Members will be aware, the economics of rail freight depends on the distance that it is carried—the longer the distance, the more commercially and economically attractive it is to use the railways.

The United Kingdom, which is geographically a relatively small country with a population largely concentrated in the south, has previously offered relatively few opportunities for long-distance rail journeys. The opening of the channel tunnel will transform the position, because it will be possible for freight to be carried on a single journey from Scotland, the midlands or wherever through the channel tunnel to France, Germany or Italy. That, together with the improved technology that is available for combined transport, makes rail freight much more feasible. British Rail estimates that about 400,000 lorry journeys a year will switch to rail as a result of the channel tunnel and that will make an important contribution towards relieving congestion on many of our roads.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I am pleased to hear my right hon. and learned Friend say that there will be a movement of freight from road to rail, but can he reassure the House that the gauges, both track and wagon, which are being manufactured for use in Britain by British Rail, will be wholly compatible with the gauges on the continent so that trains can run from the north of Scotland to Milan without the swapping of loads or other movements?

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail is conscious of the need to ensure that, as far as possible, there is compatibility. It estimates that some 80 per cent. of all the rolling stock on the continent used for freight purposes could use British lines as a result of the changes that are being made in various regards.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Is the Secretary of State aware that, almost two years ago, Tameside local authority proposed a joint venture for a freight terminal at Guide Bridge on the edge of my constituency and we were originally promised a decision by January of this year? We still have not had that decision. Will he urge British Rail to make up its mind quickly about a freight terminal in the north-west and to accept the site at Guide Bridge and get on with the work there so that we can, as the Minister has just said, take a great deal of traffic off the roads and on to the railways?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand that British Rail expects to reach a decision on that matter this summer. Therefore, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not have too long to wait before he is aware of its conclusions.

I have said that part of the thrust of the Government's policies concerns investment and part concerns using the new opportunities that the channel tunnel represents. I have also described the environmental impact represented by the improvement in section 8 grants. But I make no secret of the fact that I believe that one of the most important ways in which we can make progress is by ending the legally enshrined monopoly that British Rail presently has.

It is no coincidence that the ending of that monopoly is not only perceived in Britain to be important in increasing the use of the railways and is increasingly recognised as such within Europe, but has been adopted by the Commission and the Council of Transport Ministers. At the last meeting of Transport Ministers in Luxembourg on a proposal from the European Commission warmly supported by the United Kingdom, the EC, for the first time in the rail history of Europe, adopted a directive which will give a right of access to any international combined transport/freight operation that wishes to operate internationally within the EC.

The effect of that would be that if, for example, an operator wanted to provide a service from Manchester to Milan, he would have a right to do so, subject to the usual safety and other technical requirements, and it would not be subject to the veto of either a nationalised state monopoly railway undertaking or the Government of any member state. That is an historic decision taken by the EC which shows that the British approach to ending the monopoly as quickly as possible is warmly to be welcomed.

We in Britain have already stated our intention to move in that direction and I have been heartened over the past few weeks by the numerous representations and approaches that I have received from many United Kingdom companies interested in considering the use of rail and in making such proposals. In the near future, we will be having a seminar to which we have invited those who have an industrial interest in the possible use of rail in order that we can explore specific ways of taking the matters forward.

Mr. Adley: I am interested in what my right hon. and learned Friend is saying. He is putting forward a policy, certainly with regard to Europe, with which I wholeheartedly agree. He will, of course, confirm that his reason for welcoming the alternative uses of our tracks is

[Mr. Adley]

not a party-political dogmatic one but is that he believes that it will offer the customer a better service. If we were to open up part of the tracks on British Rail to other operators, how would my right hon. and learned Friend feel if, for example, SNCF wanted to run trains on British tracks?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome what I understand my hon. Friend to have just said—that he supports the decision taken by the EC and that he, too, like all my hon. Friends, is pleased that the monopoly of state-owned railway companies in Europe is gradually coming to an end. That is not only an important statement of principle; it recognises that there is no insuperable practical problem which would prevent the use by several operators of particular railway track. I know that my hon. Friend has been concerned in the past about some of the practical problems, and I am glad that, in his welcome for the principle, he clearly envisages that it should be possible and practicable to translate that principle into action.

My hon. Friend asked a specific question about the opportunities for SNCF or for other operators. Clearly, I look forward to the day when any railway operator within a single internal market in Europe which could meet the safety and other technical requirements would be free to provide services that the travelling public or industry in terms of freight carriage might find it useful to use. If we hope to have the opportunity for British operators to operate freely in other European countries, obviously the reverse will also have to apply or such a policy could not be taken forward. I genuinely welcome my hon. Friend's support for the ending of the monopoly, because he has an unrivalled knowledge of railway matters in the House over many years.

I have given the Government's view on these matters and it would be helpful to the debate and to a better public appreciation in Britain if the public and hon. Members could have the same knowledge of the Opposition's views on railway matters. I start with investment, because that is clearly important. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East often speaks eloquently and at length about the need for massive investment in our railways and how he would seek to ensure that that was brought about. I do not doubt that he genuinely intends to bring about such a transformation, but it is not exactly reassuring to look at investment under the previous Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman is always reluctant to have these matters drawn to this attention, but we are entitled to compare what he says, no doubt sincerely, with what took place when his colleagues had responsibility for these matters.

When one looks at the period from 1974 to 1979, one finds not only that investment was far lower than under the present Government, but, what is even worse, and even more difficult to understand and to justify, that it got progressively lower. Far from increasing under the Labour Government, it was reduced. I can give the hon. Gentleman the figures. In 1990-91 prices—to make sure that we have a confident basis for comparison—in 1975 the Labour Government provided some £568 million for investment. The following year that fell to £561 million, the year after that it went down to £541 million, the year after that down to £526 million, and then it crawled up a bit to £537 million in the final year of the Labour Government.

The Conservative Government started with investment of £556 million and now we have investment of £818 million. Therefore, the record is extremely revealing. Year after year under Labour, investment in the railways was reduced. Under a Conservative Government, particularly in the past five years, there have been unrivalled increases in real terms in investment in our railways. When the hon. Gentleman chastises us on levels of investment, I must say to him, "Physician heal thyself, then you will be able to speak with greater authority."

Mr. Prescott: It was the Conservative Government who appointed the Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry into the south-east network and the provincial network. If he looks at the investment there from 1975, he is correct to say that up to 1979 it fluctuated within £10 million or £20 million. *[Interruption.]* I am trying seriously to answer a point. The level of investment raises serious issues which I want to address. *[Interruption.]* This is an opportunity for us to have a serious debate about railway finances. If the Secretary of State looks at the investment figures, he will see that they fluctuated in the way in which he described—up and down, but around the £500 million level. If the Secretary of State looks at the figures for the first two years of this Government, he will see that there was a cut of 10 per cent., according to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I am prepared to send to the Library for those figures, and I have copies of the figures on my desk at the moment. They show a cut of almost 10 per cent. in investment levels during the first two years of the Tory Government, which was caused by the same monetary policy which led to the recession.

Mr. Rifkind: I must gently chide the hon. Gentleman. Under the Labour Government, the figures did not fluctuate; they went down. The meaning of the word "fluctuate" is simple, and cannot describe continuing decline. I know that the hon. Gentleman is embarrassed by such matters and I realise that they are, in a sense, of historical interest, but I must press him on the question of why we should have greater confidence that a future Labour Government would be able to increase investment when Labour's record is so poor.

I understand that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has said on several occasions—and I have heard him say this myself—that under a Labour Government, investment opportunities for British Rail would be transformed because it would be allowed to borrow from the private sector, as happens in France, and not only from the national loans fund. That is not quite as impressive as it sounds, for two reasons. First, the French Government still determine totality of investment; there is no unlimited investment opportunity. The only way in which one can give unlimited investment opportunity, in this country or in France, is by privatising the railways. As long as they are owned by the state, any investment, whether borrowed from the private sector or from the national loans fund, is inevitably constrained by the limits of public expenditure.

Secondly, as regards flexibility in this country, the hon. Gentleman's proposal was shot out of the air only last week by Sir Bob Reid in his evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, when he said that, even if British Rail had the opportunity to borrow from the private sector, it would not have the slightest intention of doing so because it is cheaper to borrow from the national loans fund than from the private sector, if one is in the public

sector. As a consequence, British Rail's investment potential would be reduced if it adopted the hon. Gentleman's worthy recommendation. His point is not very valid.

Another comparison between the two Governments is revealing.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Secretary of State tell us what we got in oil revenues during the period of the previous Labour Government and the amount of oil revenues during the period of the Conservative Government? Will he accept that it was logical that, having had so much money from North sea oil, we should have had a massive investment in public transport between 1979 and the present? If he makes a comparison on that basis, the Government's record is pretty appalling.

Mr. Rifkind: As the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, the reason why investment fell under the previous Labour Government was not because they wanted it to fall, but because their management of the economy was so rotten that they had to cut investment in almost every sector, and the railways were treated in the same way as the rest of the economy, in which public expenditure collapsed.

We are all anxious to see an expansion in the use of rail, so it is interesting and instructive to examine what has been achieved under this Government compared with the period 1974-79. There has been a continuing increase in the number of railway stations being opened and reopened. Under the previous Labour Government, there was an increase of about 25 in the number of railway stations available to the travelling public. Under this Administration, there has been an increase of no fewer than 108. Under the Labour Government, there was a net reduction in the number of lines that British Rail operated, whereas under the Conservative Government, there has been a net increase. That is also a revealing comment.

Mr. David Nicholson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it might have been appropriate for the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who left the Chamber shortly after his lengthy intervention on the decline of services over the past 12 years, to stay for this important section of my right hon. and learned Friend's speech?

Mr. Rifkind: Indeed. If the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) had stayed for my speech, he would have been no wiser, but probably better informed. That is a matter for him to consider.

I have some main questions to put to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, and I put them in a spirit of genuine inquiry, because I know that he is always anxious to help the House and to clarify matters of confusion. He may want to intervene to clarify these points so that they can be put on one side quickly.

What is the attitude of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, and of any future Labour Government, to industrial conflict on the railways? That matter has been of considerable importance in recent weeks, because there was a proposal at the recent conference of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen to take industrial action because of alleged grievances felt by its members over the levels of investment and other quasi-political matters. On that occasion, the union leadership took advice and was told that, under the Employment Act 1982, such industrial action would be contrary to legislaton and would not have involved protection of union funds. The strike was called off and, fortunately, the British public were spared the frustration, inconvenience and general damage to their interests of a pointless strike. I raise that point because I and the House need to know the hon. Gentleman's view on whether the 1982 Act should remain on the statute book.

The hon. Gentleman expressed his view on the subject not long ago. On 27 December 1989, the hon. Gentleman was clear about his attitude towards that legislation. He was reported in *The Independent* as having said of a Labour Government:

> "It's going to repeal all of it, there's no little bits you can keep of it. There's nothing you can keep of this legislation . . . It all has to go."

That was his view not long ago. He gave a pledge, and we, need to know whether that is still his view and still the policy of the Labour party. If that were to be the policy of a future Labour Government, this country would face the likelihood of industrial disruption on the railways on quasi-political grounds, if the ASLEF action was anything to go by. I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wants to clarify whether that is his view. It appears that he is still as shy as I described him some minutes ago and either he does not know what his party's policy is or he is reluctant to tell us what his policy is. As he is so shy on that matter, I will turn to another matter, on which he may be less recalcitrant.

Mr. Prescott: This is university debating stuff.

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful for the compliment.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, because we may hear about the Labour party's policy from the hon. Gentleman, as we are not told about it by the party's official spokesman.

Mr. Cryer: I ask a serious question about electrification around Bradford. As a result of the Government's dithering, jobs in a Leeds engineering factory are at stake. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's foolish policies have led to giving the passenger transport authority authorisation for electrification although he has still not made clear the position on rolling stock because he is patently not aware of it. The Secretary of State is supposed to make decisions as a member of the Government. All he can do is to try to make a few cheap debating points at the expense of the Labour party. The Secretary of State is a member of the Government. Why does he not make some decisions and give the people in West Yorkshire decent transport?

Mr. Rifkind: I announced an extra £400 million for British Rail only a couple of weeks ago, which the hon. Gentleman obviously missed. I appreciate his desire to divert the House's attention from understanding the policy of the Labour party. The House will have noted the shyness of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East and his colleagues and their reluctance even to tell us what the Labour party's policy is—let alone to defend it before the House.

I turn to a comparable matter of importance to see whether there is the same shyness.

Mr. Prescott: He is as bad as the other Secretary of State.

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's views. I come to his view on the need for or desirability of rail subsidies. In a number of speeches, the hon. Gentleman has attacked the Government for reducing the operating subsidies to British Rail over the years. We have emphasised that we believe that it is more important to increase investment than to use resources for operating subsidies.

What would be a Labour Government's view? The last Labour Government explained their attitude with splendid clarity—a clarity that we do not normally observe in the utterances of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East—in an official Government document, the 1977 transport White Paper. This is what it said about operating subsidies for the railways, and for other forms of public transport:

"subsidies transfer the cost of a service from the traveller to the taxpayer . . . and the traveller is often a taxpayer or ratepayer himself. To use subsidies to disguise from people the cost of the services they are paying for is pointless, and to subsidise richer people at the expense of poorer is perverse."

That was the unequivocal view of the last Labour Government—a view which is very similar to the one that Conservative Members would probably express. Let me ask the hon. Gentleman again whether Labour has now renounced the policy enunciated in the 1977 White Paper, and, if so, why it has changed its view in this specific instance. After all, in every other regard Labour Members are anxious to show how moderate and reasonable they have become, and how consensual they would like to be. Why are they now rejecting the policy of the last Labour Government, and adopting an approach that not only differs entirely from that policy, but would deny the railways the resources for investment that are infinitely more important for their expansion?

That was the second of the hon. Gentleman's fudges; I now come to the third and final fudge. Earlier, I mentioned the European Community's historic decision to end rail monopoly in Europe. That was only the first step—there is a long way to go—but the principle has been established, and all the European Governments are now committed to it. The Conservative party is also committed to it, and I do not believe that the Liberals support a British Rail monopoly either. It seems from what we have heard so far that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East and Mr. Jimmy Knapp are the only two people left in Europe, let alone Britain, who still defend it.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell us in his speech whether Labour still believes that British Rail should retain its present monopoly. Will he join me in saying that one of the best ways in which to ensure the expansion of our railways would be to end that statutory monopoly and allow all operators meeting the safety and technical requirements to provide either freight or passenger services to respond to the wishes of the travelling public and those of industry?

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Is it possible for Members of Parliament to travel on British Rail from the good city of Hull to experience the present opportunities, or are they forced to travel by road?

Mr. Rifkind: Let me emphasise that, by ending the present monopoly, we can encourage new operators not just to run trains on existing track, but, perhaps, to use new track. If new track is built, it will help to expand the network.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): If the House approves the proposal, a brand-new dedicated track may soon be built joining the channel tunnel to London. Why should it not be built by private enterprise, rather than by British Rail?

Mr. Rifkind: As my hon. Friend implies, our objective is for anyone who meets the safety and other requirements to be free to invest in rail. Certainly, no one should be constrained by either law or policy.

Those, then, are the three Labour fudges: their expressed views on industrial relations law, the monopoly and subsidies. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East now has an opportunity to do away with the fudge and to introduce the clarity for which he would like to be remembered.

5.14 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I welcome the opportunity for the House to re-examine the whole framework of the railway system. I want to avoid the rhetoric that we have heard in the past—I am as prone to rhetoric as any other hon. Member—and address my remarks chiefly to the need to establish a financial framework that will remove the current environmental and congestion problems.

When the Secretary of State first approached me about the Bill, I told him that the Opposition would give it their full support and would help to hurry it through the House. We recognised that, in the summer, British Rail would run into the buffers unless it received the necessary resources. Whatever Labour's position may have been in 1979, after more than 10 years of Conservative government, British Rail is rapidly running out of money to meet its capital investment requirement and enable it to operate effectively—money provided by the public service obligation funds.

That is not what was envisaged in 1983, when the Government appointed the Serpell committee to examine British Rail's finances. They believed that the system could be run with less money; now, we are dealing with the consequences. That is why the Bill is necessary.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, not yet.

Opposition Members are becoming used to being constantly addressed as though we were the Government. Recently, I was the first to address the Association of Metropolitan Authorities; the Secretary of State then gave his reaction to what I had said. I am happy to set the agenda on such occasions to enable a proper debate to take place. I am bound to say, however, that, after 11 years of this Conservative Government, the transport for which they are responsible is a national disgrace. They have produced the highest fares in Europe and one of the poorest services, and have failed to enable British Rail to reduce the current massive congestion costs and environmental damage.

There is growing concern in the country as a whole—a concern that is reflected on both sides of the House—about the decline in safety standards, most of which has taken place over the past 10 years. I am not relying on a hunch; inquiries have been conducted into the terrible railway tragedies at Kings Cross, Clapham, Purley and Bellgrove, all of which have been associated with the reduction in resources. In one case, single-track running

caused two trains to collide: that was intended to save money. Fortunately, the incidence of people falling out of carriage doors is now under independent investigation—owing more to pressure from the Opposition than to pressure from the Secretary of State, whom I approached at an early stage.

In its recent indictment of British Rail, the inquiry into the Clapham tragedy made it clear that the Government were responsible and had accepted their responsibility. The judge then explained that he was imposing a very small fine, because he believed that the taxpayer would have to pay in the end. That should have imposed a special responsibility on the management, particularly the chairman of the day, who made it clear that he thought it better to stay than to resign. It is a question of accountability, in the public as in the private sector, and British Rail did not face up to that.

The quality of service, like safety, has much to do with resources, but managerial competence is also important, as are the framework in which the service operates and the objectives that we provide. The Secretary of State talks a good deal about Europe. According to the Select Committee on Transport, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and all the other bodies that have analysed the matter, our railway system receives less money than any other European system—and it shows.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the hon. Gentleman is in such a consensual mood and as he so often praises the performance of the European rail system, can he tell us whether he welcomes the recent *Railway Gazette International* survey which shows that passenger growth on the British Rail system since 1985 has been far greater than that in France, Germany, Spain and Italy? The survey also shows that the punctuality of British Rail's inter-city service is far better than France's equivalent service.

Mr. Prescott: I welcome any improvement. We could argue about why people are changing from road to rail. Perhaps it is because we have the most congested motorway system in Europe. In 1979, a comparison was made between the British and European rail systems to establish just how efficient British Rail was. It came out with flying colours, compared with the European railway system, but that does not mean that there is no room for greater efficiency and for changes in the management structure.

We welcome the Bill, which provides the resources that are required for the investment that British Rail needs to make. A tremendous amount of money is required. Whether the railway system is publicly or privately owned, that investment has to be made. The new investment requirements and operating costs are considerable.

Mr. Gregory: The hon. Gentleman has rightly raised the important point that investment in British Rail lies at the heart of the Bill. Can he comment, please, on the fact that, during the last year that the Labour Government were in office, £537 million was spent on the railways, at 1990-91 prices, whereas £834 million is now being spent on the railways? Does he approve of that increase in investment? How does he answer the socialist claim that the Labour party is the only party that is really interested in public transport?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman has proved one thing—that it would be better if I got on with my speech. I intend to make exactly that point. Since, however, he has raised it at this stage, let me say now that that important point was at the heart of the argument when Peter Parker, who was chairman of British Rail in the 1970s, said that, if money was not invested in the railway system, whatever Government were in power, it would begin to fail in a few years' time, primarily because the rolling stock was about 20 years old then. More than 10 years have passed since he said that. I shall deal further with that important point later in my speech.

Unfortunately, the railways have been treated to a bunching of investment. The Treasury's approach to long-term investment requirements has made matters worse. The Bill at least provides the Government with an important opportunity to say that borrowing powers will be made available. However, much more information is needed about investment projects. The Government have made many statements about what they intend to do, but they must provide the money for those projects, which will become a reality only if resources are provided.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) will have something to say about a number of other investment programmes, but I intend to concentrate on the channel tunnel, which is probably the most important investment decision that has been made this century. It will have a major effect on our engineering works, the freight industry and the movement of people through Britain to the south and then into Europe.

Will resources be made available to finance improvements for the carriage of intermodal freight? It has been announced that Wakefield will have one of the freight terminal facilities, but British Rail has not yet allocated money for that purpose. No resources have been identified for that facility. Will it now be financed by means of the funds provided for in the Bill?

Ashford station, in a much reduced form, will be part of the international provision for the movement of goods and freight. How much money will be invested there? The Secretary of State is a convert to the advantages of overnight sleepers, as a result of his train journeys between Edinburgh and London. By means of overnight sleepers, does he intend to travel by train to Europe to discuss with the Commission British Rail's monopoly position?

I remind the Secretary of State that the Government have reached what amounts to a duopoly agreement with the French, that all freight and passenger traffic is to go through the tunnel. They have agreed, in a contract with the tunnel company to guarantee a certain level of income, whether earned or not. The Secretary of State has guaranteed that the monopoly will continue. Does he intend to repeal it? Is that part of European thinking?

It is difficult to believe that Mr. Smith, if he were allowed to run the train service, would be prepared to accept liability if there were insufficient freight or passengers. If the Secretary of State read the agreement, he might realise that he had created a duopoly between British Rail and the French railways, and that they are to be the sole provider of the services. I believe that that is right. Nevertheless, the new policy now enunciated by the Secretary of State raises interesting questions.

Will the passenger services north of London be financed by means of the funds provided for in the Bill? I doubt whether the Government and British Rail intend the service to run north beyond London. They will find that

[Mr. Prescott]

there are financial and technical reasons for curtailing it. All of a sudden, it will be Paris-Brussels-London, and then no further.

Do the Government intend to turn the investment requirements into reality? God knows, they are needed. The way that the Government arrived at their decision on the channel tunnel has to be compared with the way in which the French Government reached theirs. There is no comparison. It shows the inadequacy of our approach to strategic planning when developing our railway system. Many people in Derby and York are waiting to hear whether money is going to be made available to create the work that the investment demands.

The Bill recognises that a railway system cannot be self-financing. Our railway network amounts to 11,000 miles. Its operational and investment costs cannot be met by its own revenues. According to the Serpell inquiry in the 1980s, it was thought that a railway network of 1,600 miles could be self-financing. Unless we want the railway system to be only 15 per cent. of what it is now, the reality is that it has to be funded with public money. That is not in dispute. There may be arguments about creating a monopoly, but that network must be funded one way or another. Experience in other countries has shown that a railway system cannot exist without the investment of public money, whether it be for the provincial network, inter-city purposes or freight. The railway system must be supported by public finance.

Those requirements have not been effectively met by previous legislators, whether Labour or Tory Governments. The financial framework of the railway system leaves a lot to be desired. I do not blame entirely the politicians. One has to take into account the relationships between politicians and civil servants. Most of these issues revolve round Treasury rules. Therefore, it is up to politicians to take their courage in their hands and argue against the Treasury. Although Treasury rules never appear in our election manifestos, they dictate just about everything that we do in this House.

Things are done differently in Europe, but we are not prepared to learn from that experience. The Secretary of State should learn the lesson of the European experience and bring it back here. That lies at the heart of whether private funds can be part of these massive capital requirements, a point to which I shall return.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the great problems of strategic thinking for the railways is that, sometimes, rhetoric gets in the way of reality? There has been a great deal of rhetoric about privatisation in the Chamber today, but very few concrete plans about how it might happen. My hon. Friend has pointed out very well the difficulties of privatising any railway company that has to run a commuter network. It is impossible to make a profit on a commuter network if the bulk of trains are run at certain peak times in the day. How is such a company to be privatised?

Mr. Prescott: There is a real difficulty. We know from the civil servants in the Department of Transport and the Chevening seminar that many civil servants express the same view.

There have been inadequate funds for investment in and operation of the system. In the 1930s, the railways in Britain were collapsing. No one could find the money to operate the system or to invest in it. In fact, the system was saved by the war because the Government took it over. Then, in the 1950s, a Labour Government nationalised the railways and the first major tranche of investment in the system came under a Tory Government in 1955.

That investment was provided for the same reason as it is being provided now—the railways were collapsing. The money had to be found, whatever Government were in office. We switched from steam to diesel, cut the structure and changed the organisation. In the 1960s, Beeching and the business mind were introduced. The argument was that, if we could reduce the liabilities of the railway system, it could become viable. The network was reduced from 20,000 to 11,000 miles, which is the basic network today.

Whatever the Secretary of State may say, the reduction in line mileage is a marginal matter. That is an important point, because there have been many arguments in the House about that. In 1974, it was laid down that we should maintain a network of comparable size and quality. That has usually been defined as mileage only, not the quality or frequency of the service. That is one of the first signs of where both Tory and Labour Governments made mistakes in the management of the system.

Surprising as it may be, I want to take the politics out of the argument. The proper framework for a railway system is not an ideological issue in Europe. It is only in Britain that the Secretary of State talks about monopolies and privatisation. There may be a role for both, and we can argue about that. The system has to be supported by the state because the state has decided that a network of a certain size is necessary for our requirements. It needs to be financed and we are the custodians of the public purse. It is our job to decide what we expect of the railway, what it should do, what should be its quality and what fares should be charged.

Only some of those elements can be controlled. Both Tory and Labour Governments have tried to control them all. That continued right up to the statement by the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) on railway corporate finance. We said that that would not work, and it did not. He tried to control everything—the fares would go up and public subsidies would go down. He said that the Government might increase the investment, and I am still asking for a greater rate of return.

Now, the Bill is providing a great deal of money. In fact, the Secretary of State was shovelling in a great deal of money even before the Bill. Unusually, he was knocking on the Treasury door and changing the public expenditure requirements. The bid was already in, but the money was running out. The heart of the argument is that the House must decide what it wants to do with the railway system and what it wants the railways to contribute to the country's economy and prosperity.

Mr. Adley: This is one of the rare occasions on which I can agree with almost everything that the hon. Gentleman has said. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State had his fun, quite properly, and invited the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) to intervene during his speech. The hon. Gentleman did not do so. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman might allow my right hon. and learned Friend to intervene in his speech. If we can reach a consensus on railway policy and long-term planning, which the hon. Gentleman is now advocating, we will have a better

transport policy. Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend would care to intervene and accept the challenge that we should take party politics out of the discussion on railways.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State is an intelligent man, and he is open to argument.

Mr. Rifkind *rose*——

Mr. Prescott: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wishes to comment during the debate, we shall give him the opportunity, but I should like to develop my argument a little further.

There is an argument about relationships. As the Secretary of State pointed out, in the 1970s we saw the development of the public service obligation concept. The argument was that subsidies should not be provided for the railway service because it was subsidising only business and the rich. I do not think that many people supported that argument. The railway system of the 1990s has a major part to play in moving people round. That is an important change.

We began to identify a social part of the railway and a profitable part of the railway and that is when we began to make mistakes. We began to see that there was no cross-subsidisation and, to that extent, we should be asking ourselves what we expected from our railway system. When the Tory Government took office, they were ideologically against the fact that the railway system was publicly owned. They did not feel that the system had a great future, and people wondered whether they believed in it. In the 1980s, the then chairman of British Rail, Sir Peter Parker, and the British Railways Board made a clear statement about rail policy. It is interesting to see who sat on the British Railways Board at that time. It included Mr. David Serpell, who was later to reach far different conclusions when the civil servants got hold of him and produced the Serpell report. It also included Simon Jenkins, who is now the editor of *The Times*—I might get a good editorial tomorrow.

The report produced by that board said:

"The resulting fundamental problem, which is the thrust of this document, is that the Government through its various limits on investment, have never allowed us sufficient funds and the authority to achieve in the long term what was required."

Sir Peter Parker was talking about the age profile of the system. He said that the Europeans system was better, and that we were trying to run ours with a quarter of the resources. We all know the arguments about subsidies. People were asking for a comparison.

At that time, a report, commissioned by British Rail, was produced by Leeds university. It showed that, in all areas, including productivity and financing, British Rail had done much better. The Government did not accept that view, and they set up the Serpell inquiry. The inquiry split into a minority group and a majority group. The majority held the view that somehow the railway system could be maintained by saving money on maintenance, signalling and so on. That was bitterly disputed by British Rail, which said that, if the railway was run with fewer resources, it would break down. However, that was the policy pursued by the Government from that day.

They reduced the amount of public support and said that if British Rail needed extra resources, it should sell off its land, sack its workers and increase fares. So we moved from the highest fares to even higher fares, yet, we still could not provide the necessary resources. During the 1980s, the decision to cut back on signalling and maintenance proved to be very wrong. The inquiries into those tragedies revealed a great deal of evidence to support those who said that there was a link between the tragedies and the cuts in maintenance.

The majority of those on the Serpell committee recommended that the service could be operated on less money. It is interesting to read the minority report by Mr. Goldstein, who said that the service could not be operated on less and that, if it were, it would simply put off the evil day. He said that that would have a tremendous effect on the quality of the service. He also said that the Government should recognise the objectives of the service and he suggested changes in the Department of Transport. He took the view that the rail system needed a 20-year plan, whereas the Serpell report concentrated on the PSO grant and whether it could be maintained at its 1974 level.

The Government made a fundamental mistake in the 1980s, because the lack of resources has had a considerable effect on investment. Ministers and Labour Front-Bench spokesmen have exchanged official figures from various organisations to show who gave most. Some hon. Members believe that if we say, "We gave the highest subsidy," or the Government say, "We allocated a higher PSO grant than you did," that is somehow a successful policy. That is not necessary and it lulls us into believing that it is a policy. It is not a policy, and in many ways it has been a major mistake.

The Secretary of State and the hon Member for York (Mr. Gregory) mentioned investment data. Page 41 of the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission shows how much investment has been made: £516 million in 1975; £495 million in 1976; £475 million in 1977; £500 million in 1978; and £513 million in 1979—and that was at 1982 prices. Interestingly, the Secretary of State did not mention 1980 or 1981. In 1980, investment fell from £513 million to £401 million and in 1981 it fell to £333 million.

That supports my argument about the Treasury's hostility to investment, which it has used as a regulator under Labour and Tory Governments. We will not get efficiences without higher sustained investment. In 1955, the Tory Minister could rightly have boasted about the Government's investment programme, but more than 30 years later, without that sustained investment, we have an inefficient system and concerns are being expressed about safety. Labour and Tory Governments accepted a financial framework for our rail system that was dictated by Treasury needs, which by definition are short-term and deadly to the development of a rail system.

Mr. Beith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and with the general direction of his speech. He mentioned the PSO. Does he agree that the reduction in the PSO in the past two years has changed British Rail's policy, because it has sought to concentrate resources on a smaller and smaller part of the network in a desperate attempt to achieve the returns necessary to meet a reducing subsidy?

Mr. Prescott: I could go further. When the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) was Secretary of State, he changed the PSO requirement so that it would no longer apply to inter-city services. The Select Committee on Transport disagreed. At the heart of the argument was the Government's policy of hiving off the profitable parts of the network.

[Mr. Prescott]

The Secretary of State mentioned privatisation. The first stage of privatisation is to create a crisis so that a Minister can say, "Everybody wants privatisation because it must be better than what we have." The rail system that we have has resulted from the Government's inadequate financial provision. In their privatisation experiments, the Government have created a crisis and then suggested that the private sector could do better. As the polls show, people do not believe that once they have the goods.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman eloquently said that, under successive Governments, the Treasury's need to control public expenditure has had a significant effect on rail investment. Why does he not accept the logic of the argument that investment that cannot be made by the public sector will be attracted only by privatisation? As he is appealing for a new consensus on rail policy, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), will he accept that there is a consensus throughout Europe among Governments of different political complexions, who have called for the end of the monopoly of state controlled railways? Will he, therefore, join that consensus and say that the Labour party does not distance itself from the Government or from the rest of Europe?

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State made great play of that political point at the Conservative women's conference, but the policy does not depend on ownership. We can argue about monopolies and duopolies and about privatising public utilities, but that is not helpful. Whether the system be private or public, public money is necessary because a rail system cannot operate only from the fare box. Therefore, we are entitled to ask for accountability.

It is argued that a company must be privatised to gain access to the private financial market, but that is not true. I do not suppose that that is a shock to the Secretary of State, who has been a Treasury Minister.

Mr. Rifkind *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: I withdraw that remark. That is in his favour; I do not think that I will ever make it.

Investment in SNCF was announced on 23 May. It is phenomenally higher than ours, with 100 billion francs being spent on TGV in the next five years. The Secretary of State asked me a question that is answered in the report of SNCF's finances:

"In the 1990 budget, marked by an increase of 31·5 per cent. in the financial requirements, SNCF were able to finance internally 21 per cent. of investment",

which British Rail can do,

"9 per cent. was covered by miscellaneous income—grants and asset sales"—

which also is possible under our grant system, but for the rest SNCF borrowed money

"by raising it in the financial markets as well as by selling TGV sets to a banking consortium who leased it back."

It is not necessary to privatise the rail system to gain access to private money. The Treasury usually argues that using private money costs more, yet it has been clever in screwing a lot of money from our nationalised industries. Even the nuclear programme in France has been financed by the private market, primarily because that service is not allowed to go bust. The Treasury would say, "But that means that we stand as guarantor and it is part of our borrowing requirement." The French and German rail systems are not treated in that way.

The Secretary of State said that the French and German Governments control the amount of investment, but that is a different issue. The Secretary of State could properly ask, "Would we have to change British Rail's structure to one where a capital debt structure had to be worked out to allow it to borrow from the market?" The European Commission has asked that question. The Hundred Group of Chartered Accountants recommended what I am suggesting, and I believe that the Minister for Public Transport is a member of it.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: I withdraw that, but the hon. Gentleman is aware of the document. It is not essential for companies to go through the ideological process of privatisation to get private money.

I could never understand why publicly owned British Airways could lease aeroplanes, but British Rail could not lease its trains. It was said that, if the company went bust, aeroplanes could be sold, but that did not apply to trains. Neither would have been allowed to go bust. The truth was that the Treasury could not fund the huge amounts of money needed to buy aircraft, so not only did it allow British Airways to lease them, but it guaranteed the exchange rate. It would not help the rail system—and that was under a Labour Government.

It is the Treasury's philosophy that has dictated to us how to manage our railway system, and we then have to answer for the consequences of having a poor quality system. We get into the rhetoric of party ideology and wonder whether we are dealing with monopoly or privatisation. That remains an issue between the parties, but it is not an issue that determines the quality and safety of our railway system.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): The hon. Gentleman recognises that private sector borrowing, even by a state-owned corporation, still counts against the public sector borrowing requirement. Does he have the approval of his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to say that in future it will not? Where will the money come from? The tenor of his remarks suggested that he will change the rules. Does he have his party's approval to say that?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, and that of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. Does the hon. Gentleman think that I would come to the House and argue as I have done without discussing the issues with my colleagues? I would not.

There has been intensive discussion about what happens in the European Community. The Minister has been lecturing us from the Dispatch Box and suggesting that we learn from what is happening in Europe. One recommendation from Europe is precisely this—we do not have to privatise, although, as the Secretary of State said, that is the judgment of some chairmen, of some railways and of some Governments. That view is fine, but the Commission does not suggest that privatisation is a prerequisite, although a capital debt structure may be necessary on those industries.

I have suggested ring fencing as one method of financing the channel tunnel rail link. There are a number of attractive ways to proceed, and I am not limiting my ideas to the railways. I have just finished talking to financiers about a bus financing operation. We merely need to use our intelligence and, at the same time——

Mr. Bellingham: What intelligence?

Mr. Prescott: I did not have a public school education like you, you twit.

The bus industry is another example. Governments can play a part. We can argue about whether to go public or private, but access to the private market does not depend on becoming private.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has made an important statement in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). He said that he has the approval of the shadow Chancellor to say that a future Labour Government would change the rules of Treasury finance. They would allow access to the private sector for purposes of public expenditure with regard to railway and bus investment and, I presume, investment for other parts of the public sector.

Will he clarify that? Is he saying that the overall levels of public expenditure would be comparable to those we have at the moment, but that, instead of being financed, as in the case of the railways, from the national loans fund, they would be funded more expensively by borrowing from the private sector? Or is he saying that, through the change in the rules, he would add to the overall investment available to the railways by adding to the finance currently available from the national loans fund, many hundreds of millions of pounds from the private sector?

Mr. Prescott: At least we have been successful in bringing the Secretary of State on to the real problems of railways and finance. The technical questions that he posed have exercised my mind—[HON. MEMBERS: "They are not technical."] They are technical in that they relate to how we define the way in which our public sector industries are dealt with and the rules of operation of equity and capital are drawn up. Those issues have been spelt out in many reports, and we are dealing with them.

The Secretary of State has a long way to go, but if he wants to learn about railways I refer him to the Transport Act 1962, which states:

"the Boards may borrow temporarily, by way of overdraft or otherwise, either from the Minister or, with the consent of the Minister, from any other person".

The railways could go to the private market as envisaged under the 1962 legislation. It is the Treasury that has restricted the interpretation of how and from whom they borrow. It is a matter not of legislation, but of Treasury rules determined by Ministers and civil servants. Now that we have alerted the Secretary of State to the fact that there are other ways in which to proceed, I suggest that he puts a towel on his head and starts to think about the real issues of railway financing, and how to tackle the problems of the competing demands made on capital by hospitals, schools and other bodies.

Some cases are easier than others. Provincial railways are making losses, and although the Secretary of State talks about laying private lines it would not be easy to raise cash. There are many different approaches, such as the rail link at the channel tunnel site and its development values, the dedicated track and the new formulas for raising cash. If the Secretary of State spent as much time talking to bankers as I have done in the past year or so, he would understand that that is not impossible or unique—it has been done by European railway systems. Only ideological nonsense and Treasury daftness prevent us from doing so here.

Mr. Rifkind: I must press the hon. Gentleman further. He knows—it is not a matter of dispute—that, if one borrows from the private sector instead of from the national loans fund, it is more expensive. Therefore, if the total is the same, there will be less investment available. His proposals would help the railways only if he envisaged a substantial increase in total investment through borrowing from the private sector in addition to what the Government currently borrow from the national loans fund. Is that what he proposes? If not, his changes would lead only to a net reduction in the level of investment.

Mr. Prescott: No. We readily accept the arguments about joint financing between the public and private sectors. Why not? We would prefer that financing was publicly rather than privately led because otherwise it would be to the disadvantage of the public sector. It is possible to have different arrangements for raising money, such as leasing, and different rates. I accept that, in some cases, it may be more expensive, but it depends how much one puts in. If one wants to electrify a line and one reaches an agreement with a private company which is interested in doing the construction, one can reach arrangements that are not so heavy on the taxpayer because they have an interest in it. That is precisely what the group of one hundred auditors said.

I hope that if the Secretary of State goes to the sleeper tonight he will read that report. I could lend him my copy. Instead of asking technical questions, he should be aware that there are alternatives to knocking on the Treasury door. He should take his courage in his hands and say that he can improve the railways by private capital. My God, here I am talking about private capital and how to use it effectively to those who have been elected as its guardians. That is almost a switch around. It is staggering, but I am concerned not about the ideology of capital, but about the quality of our railway system and how to get more money for it when there are many other competing demands made on the Treasury.

Mr. Gregory *rose*——

Mr. Prescott: No, I cannot give way. If there is any doubt about the necessary scale of resources I quote Bob Reid, the new chairman, who said on "The World This Weekend":

"we're investing £1·3 billion, I would see that we would have to go on like that for the next four or five years to get the railways in shape—that's what you need."

He was then asked:

"And this is new money, new grant, or what?"

He said, "This is new money."

He was then asked:

"would it come in the form of grant, loan—because the Government often prefers to see you borrow money . . . rather than to give it to you?"

He replied:

"It really depends how the Government want to finance it"—

that is true—

"If it finances it by putting it in not as a grant, then of course you need to increase your subvention from the Government purse."

[Mr. Prescott]

The other alternative, which he put to the Select Committee, is to use private capital.

I want to leave in this debate the seeds of a cross-party consensus about a proper and adequate financial framework.

Mr. Rifkind *rose*——

Mr. Prescott: I shall finish this point, and then I shall give way.

The Secretary of State should now consider a new financial framework for the railway system, and that is what I am suggesting. Let us debate what that framework should be but, first, we must be clear about our objectives for the railway industry. What do we expect it to do and what size should it be? As the Secretary of State knows, the Government can influence certain issues either by direction or by nods and winks.

For example, he has an interest in the fare levels. The quality of service is determined by the revenue secured through fares or through the subventions that he gives in borrowings or grants. One cannot control everything. The railway management must be given a competency to get on with the job, but we must be sure that we give the management clear directions. The 1974 direction is inadequate and does not specify what resources should be given or against what standards the railway must be measured.

The Select Committee made its case clear in 1987: we cannot continue with the 1974 objectives and the financial framework that is available. Now is the time for us to make a fundamental change and to rethink. Ten years of cutting resources have had a phenomenal effect on the quality of our system. It is true that investment levels are now increasing because most of the network is in a very bad state, and we have to do something about it. Now that that is happening—as it is under the present Government and as it would under a Labour Government if elected—let us look to the future and consider how, in the next 10 years, we can give British Rail an adequate financial structure and allow it to meet its objectives, about which the Labour party is much more specific than the Government. Do not let us be ideologically obsessive about whether the railways are publicly or privately funded.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has still not given the House his view of the Labour party's attitude towards the ending of British Rail's statutory monopoly. I have asked him a very clear, very simple question. He knows the Government's view and that of the European Community. What is his view and what is his party's view?

Mr. Prescott: Let me come straight away to the point about ownership and the monopoly. I believe in the public system and in public accountability. I am prepared to accept that mixed or totally private systems can be operated, although I do not think that such systems are as good as the one in which I believe. If I am being asked to go for what is called "ending the monopoly" and privatising the system——

Mr. Bellingham: Answer.

Mr. Prescott: But it is at the heart of the argument, behind which lies the concept of competition. It is believed that competition is enhanced if there is more than one supplier on a route. I should have thought that that was part and parcel of the same philosophy. The answer is to be found in what the Government were told by their own people at the last seminar. I cannot remember who was the Secretary of State on 10 September; they change so quickly. I think that the present Secretary of State had just got the job.

Mr. Rifkind: No.

Mr. Prescott: Who was it then? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hertsmere."] That is right; it was the right hon. Member for Hertsmere. I suggest that the present Secretary of State should have a look at the confidential paper produced by civil servants and circulated to all those attending the seminar about whether we should privatise the railway system and end its monopoly. Right?

Mr. Rifkind: Really?

Mr. Prescott: These matters are part and parcel of the same argument. Didn't they tell you that at school, kid? The arguments about whether British Rail is a unit, whether there should be a track authority and so on are all connected. All those suggestions were rejected by civil servants and found not to be feasible or workable. Presumably the argument about whether there should be one provider of the railway system, a monopoly, is not so divorced from the track authority argument. Do we want the running of the track authority to be in the hands of two or three people?

Mr. Bellingham: What does this have to do with anything?

Hon. Members: Quiet, Bellingham.

Mr. Prescott: It is no wonder that the hon. Gentleman is a PPS. You will not go much further, kid.

Presumably, we would want to place the money for a track authority in the hands of one person. That would be a monopoly and would make a lot of sense. The same argument applies to the distribution of electricity. The power lies in the hands of one provider. In that case, too, it makes sense. In respect of the channel tunnel, there are two providers; a dual operator provides the services. The arrangements are written in to the contracts and agreed in Europe.

We shall not be allowing anyone else to control the system. People will not be able to say, "We are going to run a railway through," because that would run counter to the contract. But in respect of regional railways, I doubt the practicality of the monopoly position. I doubt whether any operator will consider it practicable for someone to come along and provide £500,000 for stock for a provincial railway and hope to run on the line, make a business out of it and get some of the subsidies. That is not a point worth pursuing.

Perhaps the question is whether InterCity should be a monopoly—whether we should allow ICI to run the 8 o'clock train from the north-east in competition with InterCity. That was partly what the Secretary of State was talking about when he referred to ScotRail and InterCity, except that the ownership would be different. He would be trying to introduce competition, even if one might argue about whether it would in fact constitute competition.

Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman is concerned merely with the question of private capital. If he

is asking whether the Labour party believes that a publicly owned body should become involved in joint ventures and private operations and the private sector should be allowed access to the railway system, whether in the operation of freight trains in the provision of other services, the answer is that we should be quite prepared to look at the question. We do not have an ideological position against it.

Such combinations can make a lot of sense. Such a system would also be cheaper for the railway, which could spread some of its capital costs. Track 29 provides a good example of such a system operating on the freight side. British Rail uses what it wants, and the private sector handles the facilities at the other end. I believe that TNT is asking to move on to the rail track system.

We must have one authority to deal with signalling and track safety. There is no doubt about that. One cannot put such matters into the hands of different regional authorities. That would be nonsense, as the Secretary of State's civil servants will tell him. We have no problem with general access, whether by private or public capital or in joint arrangements, and no problems with what is proposed by the EC, which I believe will not only assist with British Rail's immense capital requirements but help it to be more efficient in developing services and meeting the demands of passengers and freight. I do not have an ideological problem with that.

Mr. Rifkind: Frankly, I do not think that the House is yet any clearer about the hon. Gentleman's views on monopoly. I shall try to be as specific as possible. Even if British Rail remained a public-sector-owned industry, it would be possible to end its monopoly—in other words, to give other operators the right not just to provide capital but, without British Rail's approval, to operate freight or passenger services on the track. That is what ending the British Rail monopoly means. It is a separate issue from privatisation, and we still do not know what the Labour party's attitude to it is.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State thinks that he is on to a major point. That is not the issue with the railways.

Mr. Rifkind: It is.

Mr. Prescott: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely obsessed with this point, and it is tragic to have a Secretary of State obsessed with a point.

Mr. Rifkind: Answer the question.

Mr. Prescott: I am trying to answer it. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State said nothing about the development of railway policy. We are talking about the monopoly, and whether parts of the system can be given over. We already have Yeoman Foster——

Mr. Rifkind: Answer.

Mr. Prescott: Wait a minute. There is already a lot of private capital operating on the railway system.

Mr. Rifkind: But with permission——

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State has apparently learnt that British Rail has to give permission—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Heckling from a sedentary position does nothing to improve the quality of our debates. Let us proceed.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State and I can no doubt agree that the overriding consideration is the quality and safety of the railway system. That matter has to be in the hands of one authority. As the lorry industry has shown, it does not always work if one lays down quality standards and assumes that all the operators will meet them. I have severe doubts about such an approach.

There must be one authority, but I find no ideological problem in allowing the private sector access to the railway system, provided that the main authority has access to its terminals and can use its facilities to meet requirements and safety standards. Having said that, it is all-important for British Rail to continue to provide its own facilities and not simply to become a track authority for the private sector. It is important for British Rail to play a part in the development of services and not to be told, "Stay out; it is up to the private sector"—which, I suspect, is basically what the Government are about.

If what the Secretary of State wants is to end the monopoly to bring that about, we shall have a repetition of our experience with the privatisation of the bus service, where deregulation has led to real problems. I should hate to see such problems on the railway system. We believe that one responsible authority can produce better safety standards than can be produced where responsibility is distributed between a number of bodies. I maintain that there must be one authority.

Let me reiterate my point. The Bill affords an opportunity for us all to recognise what we can do and to learn from Europe. We should not be too arrogant to learn from European practices and to ask whether we can use European financing formulas in a different way and give a whole new future to the railway system. Everyone in the country wants that. We can unite in trying to achieve that end, but we must first be prepared to look at the problems and to leave political rhetoric behind us. Both because of congestion and in the interests of the environment, the people of Britain require a good railway system. Now, in the 1990s, the railways have a better opportunity than they have ever had before. Do not let us allow it to be spoilt because the politicians stay on the sidelines, spouting ideological rhetoric and doing nothing to produce a proper railway system.

6.9 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I hope that my colleagues and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) will not mind if I say that the hon. Member made a remarkable speech. If it were possible to achieve the cross-party consensus of which he speaks, there is no doubt that the railways of this country would benefit, and that would mean that the people would benefit.

I do not normally write out my speeches with great care. However, I had written:

"Would it not be a good idea if we could have a cool if not philosophical look at a subject that would benefit from being free from party political prejudices?"

Before the debate started, I might have thought that that was a vain hope. Perhaps the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has given us a little hope that we might in the House and in the country once in a while lift our minds above the partisan political battle and agree on a long-term future for one vital part of our national economy—our railway system.

[Mr. Robert Adley]

The money that is required for any major new railway project, and the time that is needed to spend it wisely on investment, extends far beyond the lifetime of any Government. I hope that I will not embarrass my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and his colleagues when I say that I welcome the obvious change in policy which they have initiated over the past few weeks.

Until quite recently it was my impression that the Government had no transport policy other than the quest for profitability almost regardless. That has been changed to a positive policy of seeking to transfer traffic from road to rail. The Government's conversion to the need for an interventionist public transport policy is good news for the railways which have a vital role to play in maintaining civilisation as we used to know it on a small, industrialised, overcrowded island.

The new policy was encapsulated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. Although I do not intend to weary the House with endless quotations, my right hon. and learned Friend, in his speech at the *Financial Times* conference on 28 May, said:

"Congestion is the result of the decisions of millions of ordinary people. The only solution to congestion is for many of those ordinary people to make different choices. The responsibility of Government is to help them make that choice."

That was a sober assessment of the need not only for guidance and exhortation from Government but for a transport policy based on the national interest and one that recognises that the Government must convert from thought to reality the implementation of that policy. That inevitably means the long-term funding of such policies.

I want to divide my speech into three parts—the past, the present and the future. We do not need to spend much time on the past, but we can learn lessons from it. When the steam engine was invented in this country it provided man with his first opportunity to travel faster than the fastest horse or camel. We then saw the inexorable rise of the internal combustion engine. When people can drive their own cars, that will always be cheaper than using another form of transport where one must buy the services of a driver.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred to Beeching. Beeching's main policy was to eliminate competitive rail routes. That was one of the most cynical acts of policy from which this country has ever suffered. It was a deliberate act of policy. The Beeching plan was sired by Marples, but implemented by Barbara Castle. I do not wish to make a partisan point about that because the policy was introduced by one Government, but implemented by another. That policy destroyed the option of rail competition between British cities.

If I may be a little blunt, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was disingenuous to argue with the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) when he made his point about rail services competing on the same track. My right hon. and learned Friend referred to the Glasgow to Edinburgh line. By sheer chance there are alternative routes. My right hon. and learned Friend knows the area much better than I do, but even he will agree that to propose that the route from Glasgow to Edinburgh via Carstairs is a more competitive route than the more direct line is to use circumstances to meet one's arguments. My right hon. and learned Friend would not design a rail link to take people from Glasgow to Edinburgh via Carstairs.

It used to be possible to have genuine competition between London and Birmingham. One could travel via the London Midland and Scottish railway between Euston and New Street or on the Great Western railway from Paddington to Snow Hill. Naturally the latter route was better, but of course I am never partisan about these matters.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State referred to the London to Birmingham line as if we had turned the clock back 30 years. The line between Leamington Spa and Coventry has virtually all been singled. It was never the intention to maintain that line as a competing service between London and Birmingham. It is now possible to travel that route because of the intense pressure on travel requirements between London and Birmingham that has built up over the past few years. It is possible to travel that route in spite of, and not because of, the policies of successive Governments. If my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State were to study the service of through trains between Paddington and Birmingham as recorded in British Rail's timetable, he would not, with his background, describe it in the House as a competing service for the Euston to New Street route.

We destroyed much of the genuine competition that had been built up over generations. Some people are now trying to create what I would describe as phoney competition on the same tracks. The hon. Member for Pontypridd referred to that, and his comments were pooh-poohed by some of my colleages.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was kind enough to suggest that I might know a little bit about railway policy and about railways. On the point about phoney competition, I want to quote from the evidence given by Mr. Richard Hope, who will be known to many hon. Members, when he appeared before the House of Lords European Communities Committee on 25 October 1990. He said:

"I am not aware of any situation in the world where there is effective competition between passenger trains using the same tracks."

Those who advocate competition must address that point. They cannot duck it. The idea of creating competition between passenger trains using the same tracks is like trying to create phoney competition that will not result in the running of a better railway service. Will my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State be kind enough to tell me which countries he was thinking of which had done that or were contemplating it?

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I have been listening very carefully to my hon. Friend. I agree with him and with some of the examples raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House earlier. Does my hon. Friend accept that what he has described is the approach taken by the European Commission, charged as it is under the treaty of Rome, for the development of a communitywide transport policy to promote the competition reforms to which my hon. Friend is alluding instead of the idea of different trains on the same tracks and all that illusory nonsense which is totally unrealistic? The Commission wants greater competition between different forms of transport.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend studies those matters, and he is right. I am in favour of ending BR's monopoly and

that is the policy of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. I have not yet been convinced however that the illusory privatisation argument, which is quite separate, would result in a better railway. Let me return to where I was. By selling track bed in the 1960s, we closed options just when the roads were becoming clogged. We have built more roads and they have become even more clogged.

I have pleaded with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State as I did with his predecessors—I have got nowhere although I place this point on the record again today—to recognise that there is a difference between instructions to BR to sell off surplus land of a general nature and an instruction from Government to BR to sell off track bed from which services have been removed. Unless we recognise that we are constantly destroying assets that can probably never be replaced, we will not be able to take advantage of the legacy of our forebears. That is a simple point, although I realise that its implementation requires a degree of intervention. However, if my right hon. and learned Friend's words are to be taken at face value, they mean that he is not opposed to some form of intervention. Please could we stop selling so-called redundant track bed?

What has happened in this country—and all over Europe—is simple; the internal combustion engine, which once appeared likely to sound the death knell of the railways, has by its very proliferation, brought about a railway renaissance. The purpose of this debate must be to see whether we have the will to achieve that renaissance and whether we shall will the means so to do. That is putting the debate in the context of learning from the past. We are now beginning to have what I regard as a healthy debate but, in the past, it has been motivated too much by partisan political knee-jerk reactions. Even *The Times*, that organ of independent thinking—*[Laughter.] Hansard* cannot record things in inverted commas, but my hon. Friends have just given a slight guffaw. *The Times* recently had a leader that was entitled "Break up and sell" but which then stated,

"BR is probably the most cost-effective big railway in the world".

It is extraordinary to admit that one has one of the best railways in the world and yet to state that the prescription for its future is to break it up and sell it. If some of my hon. Friends could occasionally give some acknowledgement of British Rail's successes despite all its difficulties, that would be most welcome.

I welcome the commencement last week of the full electric service on the east coast mainline. *The Times* undertook an interesting exercise involving three travellers, travelling by air, rail and car. I shall not repeat all the comments that were made, but the only one who enjoyed his journey was the one who travelled by train. The journey by car took seven hours and 55 minutes. When I was sitting in the Tea Room, one of my right hon. and learned Friend's ministerial colleagues said, "Yes, but the journey only cost £30·73." That is where we come to the rub, because that amount is only a tiny fraction of the real cost of the car journey both to the driver and to the nation. Unless and until the House is willing to recognise the real cost to this country of motoring, the motor car and the internal combustion engine, we will never get to the heart of the debate.

Although, as I have said, I welcome the east coast main-line electrification, one has to be frank and say that we have spent £400 million on modernising a Victorian railway while most of our continental competitors are building new railways. I am often asked how the railways are doing in comparison with other countries. I shall weary the House briefly with a story that was told to me in a different context by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Home of the Hirsel.

During his last year as a Member of this House, my right hon. and noble Friend was giving his annual garden party when he was approached by a man whom he recognised as one of his most cantankerous and difficult constituents. Of course, none of us has such people in our constituencies but, unfortunately, my right hon. and noble Friend did have such a constituent. Thinking of something totally bland to say as the chap walked towards him, Lord Home said, "Good afternoon, Mr. So-and-so, how is your wife?" to which the answer was, "Compared to what?"

I shall take that as the thesis for this part of my speech. When I am asked how our railways are doing, I must add, "Compared to what?" Compared to France and Germany to name but two, we are modernising a Victorian railway while they are building new railways.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: I am interested in my hon. Friend's point, but I wonder whether he thinks it right that British Rail is bringing forward proposals for a channel tunnel rail link which is to be superimposed on the existing Network SouthEast? Would it not be far more sensible to have a completely new route, with a dedicated freight line and a fast passenger route instead of the makeshift and ramshackle proposals that British Rail has produced so far?

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend is tempting me. Some of our European colleagues think that we are barmy. They do not understand how we can still be arguing about whether to build a brand new railway line. Of course my hon. Friend is right. Of course we have to have a new railway line. However, I am afraid that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) allowed herself to be persuaded to include clause 42 in the channel tunnel legislation at the behest of some of her friends who ran the ferries, thus preventing public investment in a new railway system, and that is the root cause of the problem. However, that was during the ancien regime, and I do not want to be sidetracked down that blind alley.

The train grand vitesse is the French Government's visible commitment to a transport policy in which the train is more than an afterthought. As has been said, the French Government are about to invest £21 billion, aimed at more than doubling the size of France's TGV network over the next two decades.

Together with the hon. Member for Pontypridd, I spent two or three days in Germany a couple of weeks ago. We talked to the German Department of Transport, to those connected with the German railways and to German politicians. We travelled from Frankfurt to Hanover in the cab of a new German intercity express on a brand new railway line. One only has to do that to see the investment that has been made. One could almost hear the money falling out of the German Treasury. There has been massive investment in a public facility. The German Government are not exactly noted for running the most inefficient and overburdened economy in western Europe—

Mr. Gregory: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Adley: Of course, if you, Madam Deputy Speaker, do not mind.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not, provided that the intervention is short.

Mr. Gregory: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He has said that he travelled in the cab of a German train. Will he tell the House the manning levels in that cab? Was one driver responsible, or, as in this country, was there overmanning? The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen has such power that it can require a minimum of two people in the cab at all times so that the second person can be pouring tea or reading the *Daily Mirror*.

Mr. Adley: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but there were two people in that cab——

Mr. Gregory: My hon. Friend and the driver.

Mr. Adley: There were two German railwaymen in the train, the hon. Member for Pontypridd and myself——

Mr. Gregory: That makes three.

Mr. Adley: No, There were two German railwaymen in the train, plus the hon. Member for Pontypridd and myself, which makes four. I must advise my hon. Friend that two plus two still equals four, so the answer to his question is that there were two railwaymen in the cab.

Mr. Snape: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman who, like me, is usually provoked by the barmy interventions of his hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory)—who, fortunately for the fair city of York, will soon be back sniffing wine corks or doing whatever he did before being elected to the House. As we are comparing cab rides, may I advise him that, when I travelled on the Japanese high-speed railway line some years ago, there were two men in the cab although the line is virtually semi-automatically operated? Before the hon. Member for York asks any more inane questions, there was a driver and his mate, but I am not sure of the Japanese translations for either.

Mr. Adley: The hon. Gentleman is, as usual, being extremely unkind and unfair to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory), who asked a question to which I did my best to give him a straightforward answer.

The line from Frankfurt to Hanover continues to Hamburg, and 40 per cent. of it runs in a tunnel to cope with the environmental problems that might otherwise have been caused. Perhaps that helps to answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden). The Germans recognise that, if there is a conflict between the environment and public transport—the railways—the Government must pay the environmental costs.

I have mentioned France and Germany, and shall now turn to Sweden which, until recently, used to be mentioned by some of my hon. Friends with incredulity as a country that is privatising its railways. At the moment, the Swedish national railways have a Government-funded budget of £1·5 billion over the next seven years—for a country of 8·5 million people. It is true that the Swedish Government have carried out a detailed examination of the option of privatisation, but they have now decided that that is an unattainable ambition and that all the shares in the railway company that was established will be held by the Government of Sweden for the indefinite future. There are now no plans to seek to sell off the shares. That is yet another country which has tried to find a way of privatising the railways and has not succeeded.

One thing that the Swedish Government have done—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will take comfort from this—is to allow the Swedish railways to run alternative modes of transport. The Swedish railways have set up their own bus services in competition with the private sector but in co-ordination with their railway services. That, too, might make some of my hon. Friends gasp, but I merely state the factual position in Sweden.

The Swedes have introduced what they call the tilt train, which we called the advanced passenger train when we invented it here 15 or so years ago and starved it to death for lack of investment. That system of transport could now be sweeping the industrialised world. Fiat is building a train similar to the APT, and so are the Swedes. If ever one wanted a classic example of failing to back success, one would have to look only at the sad tale of the APT and the steps that are being taken elsewhere in Europe to build what we invented.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, who has had to leave the Chamber, referred to Japan in his speech. I have had lengthy meetings with the Japanese transport councillor at the Japanese embassy in London and the head of one of Japan's six new companies. They told me that I was the first British politician who had ever been to see them to discuss Japanese railway policy and what was happening in Japan.

The Japanese are restructuring their railways, as the hon. Member for Pontypridd knows. I must say that I am training him well to be a spokesman on the railways. The Japanese have established six non-competing passenger companies. They have been created on a geographic basis into regional monopolies. The counsellor at the Japanese embassy said to me:

"Your understanding of privatisation is totally different from ours. Ours is restructuring not privatisation."

In the past 27 years, the Japanese national railways have procured over 2,000 km of new double-track mainline high-speed railway—all constructed with public funds. What have we done in Britain during the same period? The latest information available to me is that we have built one and a half miles of new double-track high-speed railway—the Windsor link in Manchester. It is true that the Stansted link will be built. Indeed, I believe that it is nearing completion. But it perhaps says a great deal more than words of mine ever could that that piece of track will be the longest piece of new railway in Britain, and it is a branch line to an airport.

The six Japanese regional companies will automatically qualify for 50 per cent. Government grant on new railway construction costs. I have done my best to check my facts.

Mr. Dykes: Perhaps my hon. Friend would also care to mention the high-speed train that is planned between Madrid and Seville, on which we both travelled in recent months.

Mr. Adley: I am trying to keep my speech short. Of course I could mention that line, but my hon. Friend has now done so, so I do not need to amplify the point. Spain is yet another European country which is building new railways.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has frequently said to me, "We are going to do what the

Japanese are doing." All that we have to do in order to do what the Japanese are doing is the following. It is quite simple. We build 2,000 km of main-line railway for high-speed trains at public expense. Then we transfer British Rail free of charge to six non-competing regional monopolies, financed initially by the public sector. Having done that, we write off all British Rail's debts and financial commitments involved in any staff reductions which any new private railway might inherit. Then, to finalise the process, we give the six regional monopolies an open-ended guarantee that any new private railway company would automatically qualify for a 50 per cent. grant for all new construction.

If that is what my right hon. and learned Friend means by privatisation, I am entirely in favour of it, but I suspect that that may not be quite what some of my colleagues have in mind. The debate continues, but if Lord Home were to ask his erstwhile constituent what he thought of our railways the reply might also be, "Compared to what?"

I turn briefly to the future. The Government have at last begun to define the future role of our railways. I welcome that and the recent decision referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, by the Community transport council in Luxembourg to seek to create a single market in transport. But the question for us remains whether we are prepared to recognise that the Department of Transport operates a wholly unequal investment regime between road and rail when there is competition for scarce funds.

I referred earlier to the comment by one of the Minister's colleagues in the Tea Room abut the £30·73 cost of travelling by car from London to Edinburgh. The true cost of the internal combustion engine in Britain is unknown and, at the behest of the road lobby, remains carefully hidden. Over the years, I have done my best to find out the cost, for example, of the court time which is taken up in dealing with traffic offences and accidents. When I asked specifically what was the cost I was told in a written answer that the cost of answering my question would be prohibitive. The Department cannot even afford to answer the question, so we have absolutely no idea what the real costs are.

Recently, my wife and I were travelling to London with our three dogs and God knows what else—by road, I fear. We were stopped by the Wiltshire constabulary——

Mr. Gregory: For speeding?

Mr. Adley: No, we were not stopped for speeding.

Two highly trained policemen in a large motor car spent 23 minutes with us. My wife is an extremely careful driver. She never drives at more than 69 miles an hour.I timed the two policemen. They spent 23 minutes following and then measuring, centimetre by centimetre, the distance between the letters and the numbers on my front and back number plates. What was the cost to the taxpayer of that 23 minutes of the time of two highly trained men? Do the police have nothing better to do? That is a matter for the chief constable of Wiltshire, but if we added up the true costs of the internal combustion engine in Britain, the answer would be unbelievable.

It is not just the cost of police time in dealing with accidents and congestion, apart from the time-wasting activities such as I have described—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) is muttering. I am not sure what he is saying.

British Rail pays its own police force. Why, if we are trying to create a level playing field, do we tolerate British Rail having to pay for its own police force?

How much does the nation spend on lawyers to deal with traffic offences? How much does road transport cost the national health service? We kill 5,000 people and maim 250,000 every year. How much social security funding is stashed away on helping people who have been injured in road accidents? In the end, what is the value of human life? If we valued human life, we would impose on our roads the same safety criteria that Parliament has always applied to the railways. That would, at a stroke, make British rail the most profitable organisation in the world. But there is no chance of that, because the sad fact is that, in road transport, any conflict between human misery and human convenience is always settled in favour of the latter.

If the future is to be based on a serious and honest assessment of the true costs of road traffic and the inevitable congestion and pollution that flows therefrom, no one will be happier than me. But I have yet to detect any hint that that is the Government's or any political party's intention.

In conclusion, I turn to the citizens charter. What does the citizen want? I suspect that the citizen wants fast, punctual trains and cheap fares as well as empty roads and free parking. In the case of British Rail, the idea behind the citizens charter fails to tackle the question whether the provider of the service has the resources and the ability to provide what the traveller wants. I do not know whether that question has been considered seriously. Of course, British Rail is subject to substantial restraints on investment and subsidy which inevitably affect the level and quality of service. Those are ministerial decisions.

Will Ministers be held to account if the rail traveller seeks to invoke the citizens charter? Let us suppose that Joe Bloggs finds that his train is late and wants to invoke the charter and claim compensation. All sorts of questions arise. Was the delay caused by an accident? Was it caused by vandalism? Was there a suicide on the line? What about hoax telephone calls? On 25 February this year, one man —I am glad to say that he is in prison now—disrupted the travel plans of 500,000 passengers and cost British Rail £25 million. How does the citizens charter fit into that? I fear that, if we are not careful, we shall end by putting more money into the hands of lawyers, as so often happens when we allow enthusiasm to evolve into legislation.

Is the road traveller to have a citizens charter? Are delays to be blamed on Ministers who allow road works to take place on the A303 trunk road to the west country in the middle of July? What about a citizens charter for airline passengers—or is it only the public sector that should be subject to the rigours of this discipline? If so, is there really a role for a citizens charter in transport?

I have not had time to discuss numerous aspects of future policy options. I close with a few thoughts on what is happening in Germany. The Germans have a state-funded railway, but they know that it costs them a great deal of money, so there is now a thoroughgoing examination of the relationship between the German Government, Deutsche Bundesbahn and the German people. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said, it is essential to recognise that discussion of privatisation is quite separate from the need to strike a fair balance as between the infrastructure costs of road and rail.

[Mr. Adley]

There is no doubt that those costs need to be reviewed, but that is a discussion separate from the one about privatisation. The Germans are less hidebound on these issues than we are, with our party political stances, and they recognise this. Chancellor Kohl has decided to establish a Government railway commission. Can we re-examine the role of the railways in society free from partisan prejudice? Let us take a leaf from Helmut Kohl's book. Changes to the relationship between the German Government and Deutsche Bundesbahn would require a change in the constitution, a problem that we do not face here, so such changes should be much simpler for us.

I should like the Government to establish a Government railway commission with terms of reference similar to those given by Chancellor Kohl to the German railway commission. Those terms would be simple: first, to define the role of British Rail in the national and international transport markets; secondly, to define and delineate the railways' public or community responsibilities versus their business or economic responsibilities; thirdly, to set out the conditions for a rational and requirement-specific fulfilment of tasks by British Rail. In this way our future transport policy could be reached in a climate of rationality and realism which is long overdue.

6.42 pm

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): This debate is timely, in that it allows those concerned with the declining standards of service on British Rail to demonstrate the desperate and long-standing need for higher investment and for decent levels of borrowing. It is also timely because BR is in a grave crisis due to the terrible neglect of the past decade or more. It is desperately in need of a new deal. Cosmetic promises have been made by the Secretary of State; now is the time to put his money where his mouth is. That is what most people want.

It is a major scandal that the Government have run the railways into the ground, compared with those of other countries such as France, where Governments of left and right value praise and even use the railways. The crisis on BR has become so acute that senior management figures, honourable men and women with a public service vocation and a concern for BR, are prepared to put their jobs on the line.

Many hon. Members will have seen the informative article in *The Independent on Sunday* on this issue. I want to refer to it briefly. According to Ian King, then an area manager in Manchester,

"we are giving our customers as poor a quality of service as many of us can remember."

He has also said:

"We charge fares that should provide a quality product but we do not."

These BR dissidents have been treated in a way that would make Joseph Stalin blush. This House, if not the British Railways Board or the Government, should carefully listen to their views. They reflect the experience of many years and a commitment to decent public transport, which is vital if we are to reduce the environmental damage of the motor car.

Many managers are terrifically concerned about the quality of the service—late trains, cancelled trains, overcrowded trains, insufficient public investment and high fares. The central transport consultative committee has justly criticised the Government's underfunding and has questioned the legality of cuts in British Rail services—cuts that have hit rural areas hard, and they are the areas of greatest social need.

Has the Minister finally replied to the committee's letter? If not, will he answer it when he closes the debate? I share the committee's anxiety, but I want to concentrate this evening on one aspect of the BR crisis.

No one has yet mentioned the problems and treatment of the disabled. That treatment is disgraceful, uncivilised, discriminatory and unjust. The Government's consistent underfunding of British Rail and their limitations on borrowing have prevented BR from ensuring that its services are fully accessible to all citizens, especially disabled people.

Disabled people get a raw deal in all walks of life. There are well over 6 million of them and they deserve better, comprehensive and anti-discriminatory laws to guarantee their rights, not least on the railways. Unfortunately, the Government cop out on the need for such laws. Worse, instead of enhancing the rights of the disabled in employment, they are eroding those rights. If anything, the Government are anti-disabled. For them, the disabled are second-class citizens.

It is in this shocking state of affairs that BR is trying to do its best within the limitations of its funding. Its record may be better than that of other major institutions, but it still leaves a great deal to be desired. BR has set up an advisory group on disability, I concede, but its efforts have been shown to be half-hearted and less than credible by the outrageous experience of the new multi-million pound sprinter class 323 train, which can be seen at Tickfords of Coventry.

I recently took the opportunity, together with local representatives of disabled people, of inspecting the mock-up of the new train. The class 323 train miserably fails to provide for the disabled, who need easily accessible door operating buttons, signs, fixtures and other special fittings. In response to early-day motions that I have tabled on this matter, BR's parliamentary affairs manager, Mr. Austin, sent me a letter outlining the official BR position. It argues that credit should be given for real successes and that solutions should be sought to real problems. I take it from the letter that the needs of the disabled do not constitute a real problem. Perhaps I should hand a bouquet to the Government, British Rail, Centro, and Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire transport authorities—to the professional staff and the politicians who deliberately decided to commission the class 323 train, which has toilets for the able-bodied and no toilets for the disabled and whose design gives little consideration to handrails or door-operating buttons.

In the light of those glaring omissions, I would point out to Mr. Austin and to all involved in this project that one cannot give to anyone what is their right. However, as of right, the disabled must have toilets, and the wide range of aids that they need at every station and on every train. I would also point out to all involved in transport strategy that the introduction of this type of train in America would fall foul of the law there.

Mr. Snape: Is my hon. Friend aware that the class 323 was designed to the specification of some of the passenger transport authorities that he has just castigated; that the door to the toilet, which he said could not be used by the disabled, will be redesigned before the train enters service,

so that they can use it; that the class 323 is a two-car unit in which one seat can readily be removed so that a wheelchair can be placed at a table inside the train; and that the vestibule on both the coaches making up the unit has been designed to allow people with disabilities—to use the proper term—to use a local train travelling over comparatively short distances? Furthermore, Centro and the other passenger transport authorities consulted BR's disability panel, which consists entirely of people with disabilities.

I hope that, on reflection, my hon. Friend will realise that some of his criticisms were a little unfair, and that, despite the financial constraints under which passenger transport authorities have to operate, some new provision is being made for the disabled.

Mr. Hughes: I acknowledge the point that my hon. Friend has made.

I mentioned the law in America. The legislation dealing with passenger coaches for those who use wheelchairs says:

"Single-level passenger coaches shall be required to—

(i) be able to be entered by an individual who uses a wheelchair;

(ii) have space to park and secure a wheelchair;

(iii) have a seat to which a passenger in a wheelchair can transfer, and a space to fold and store such passenger's wheelchair; and

(iv) have a restroom usable by an individual who uses a wheelchair".

The provisions that we make fall far short of those requirements.

However, just because the British Government are opposed so strongly to legislation that would discriminate in favour of the disabled does not absolve others from their obligation towards the disabled. Silence on this important issue is tantamount to collusion. Inaction reinforces discrimination. Lip service has been paid by many to this important issue. This is obvious when Centro says that the passenger transport executive did not have a demand for toilets, and when BR has decided that the disabled should have toilets only at stations. I welcome the building of those toilets, but there are 63 stations in the Centro region, and toilets should be built at every station. BR cannot be allowed to dodge its responsibility to the disabled, and to relegate them to third-class status. If there are accessible toilets for the able-bodied, then there should be toilets for the disabled, too.

What is worse—to add insult to injury—the 323 train toilets are situated next to the wheelchair section of the unit. As one of the local representatives of the disabled has pointed out:

"No other passenger is asked to sit next to or near the toilet facility."

But that seems to be all right for the disabled, even though they cannot use the facility and even though some would be adversely affected—physically—by proximity to the toilet and running water.

BR cannot be allowed to wash its hands of the disabled, although I readily concede that the ultimate responsibility for this dreadful discrimination lies with the Government and their refusal to fund a decent public service for all.

Mr. Gregor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: In his response to me, Mr. Austin argued:

"British Rail has always believed that wheelchair users should be assisted in and out of trains, using ramps, to minimise the risks of injury to both customers and staff."

I am afraid that that is not good enough. To pick up what my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) said about consultation with other bodies for the disabled, I can say that my friend, Mary Beaumont, the representative for Nuneaton and Bedworth Council for the Disabled, asked:

"Was it not perceived that many disabled people want to travel independently, as do the able-bodied?"

What if there is not staff available at the station when the wheelchair user gets on or off the train? As she points out, "even if somebody has helped you on to the train, you can be stuck at the other end if you cannot open the door at your station, and if you are in an electric wheelchair and there is no ramp available at the platform."

She adds that she is worried that

"even though other people may be on the train"—

of course, they may not be—

"they may not be getting off at your station, and by the time someone has noticed you cannot open the door"—

that is, if they are bothered—the train will have moved on.

Mr. Gregory: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Austin also argues that the single step "allows the optimum compromise between vertical and horizontal stepping distances."

Mr. Gregory: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify whether this is a debate or an opportunity for hon. Members to read a script that they can later give to *Hansard*? If it is a debate, does it not involve both sides of the House, Government and Opposition?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Gentleman knows that it is within the accepted traditions of the House for an hon. Member to refresh his memory from notes, albeit that they may be copious from time to time.

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Austin also argues:

"Any dropping of train-floor height requires an increase in the horizonal gap which would be dangerous to all passengers . . . There is no simple solution to that problem without rebuilding Britain's railway infrastructure."

It is one thing to say that change cannot be made overnight, and another to refuse even to start the process of change. The main problem is finance, and this brings us back to the Government's underfunding and the need to increase BR borrowing.

Mary Arnold of the Coventry Council for the Disabled, of which all Coventry Members of Parliament are vice-presidents, adds to my criticism of the 323 train by saying:

"The only real concession to wheelchair users is the tip up seats. The electric door switches are impossible to reach . . .there is no grabrail to hold on to, to keep your wheelchair steady."

Overall, I hope that the House will agree with Mary Beaumont, the representative of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Council for the Disabled and the Warwickshire Coalition for People with Disabilities, when she describes these mock-ups as "glorified guard's vans".

My final criticism is about BR's consultation with disabled people. The direct testimony of disabled people that I have quoted should have been taken fully into account in drawing up the design specifications. Mary Beaumont rightly expressed her deep disappointment that more research into possible usage by wheelchair-bound people, who are also potential commuters, was not carried

[Mr. Hughes]

out. I am sure that this contention will be reflected by the central passenger transport consultative committee. According to its secretary, Michael Patterson, it has yet to finalise its report on the class 323 and provision for disabled people. The Coventry Hereward college for the disabled is also preparing a report on the mock-up. I await those reports with interest.

I hope that hon. Members will put pressure on the appropriate authorities to make the necessary changes in the new train. It is not too late to change the design specifications for the class 323 so that it provides the best of facilities for disabled people. I urgently appeal to British Rail to do that, or it will do the disabled a great injustice.

I ask the House to examine the American disabilities legislation, from which I have quoted. That law was passed without reference to costs because those who passed it argued that the rights of the disabled were above cost. Such laws should be part of human rights. A society that treats disabled people so shabbily disables itself because it fails to tap the many talents of all its citizens. The way in which disabled people are treated on the trains, the buses, and almost everywhere else is a disgrace. Investment in and higher borrowing levels for British Rail would start to give the disabled a better deal, especially if they and their organisations are fully consulted. I hope that the Minister will tell the House tonight that the Government will urgently allocate specific funds for the needs of the disabled.

7 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): For a long time—indeed, since I became a Member of this House in 1983—I have had a keen interest in transport, and in the railway industry in particular. I am vice-chairman, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), of the Conservative parliamentary transport committee. We work strongly in the best interests of public transport, and the railways in particular.

I welcome this Second Reading debate, as I shall welcome the other stages of the Bill. I have a constituency interest as York has the headquarters of the eastern region of British Rail, and shortly it will have the headquarters of BR's freight operation. York is also an important centre for the denationalised sector of British Rail, as one of the key plants of British Rail Engineering Limited is situated there, with two more being in Derby and the fourth in Crewe. It also has Golden Rail, the tourism interest of BR, and the Royal York hotel—to name but a few.

The Bill would increase BR's borrowing limit to £3,000 million, which is not an inconsiderable sum, extendable to £5,000 million, with the grant at the same levels. It is therefore appropriate that the House considers the use of the finances provided to date and how far BR has fulfilled its obligations to its passengers, its freight customers and its staff.

It is clear that, at today's prices, BR has cost the taxpayer £16 billion since the Conservative party took office. I shall put that into the jargon that the electorate can understand—it is £800 for every household in the country. One point that is crystal clear now, and will be crystal clear at the hustings, is that investment under the Conservative Government has been the highest in real terms for 29 years, at £834 million. That is a telling figure, of which I am proud.

Dr. Kim Howells: The hon. Gentleman has referred to large sums, and we all appreciate the enormous strain of such sums on the economy. However, they must be compared with the amount of money invested by the most successful economy, at least until now, in western Europe—west Germany. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and I were told by representatives of the west German Government that the subsidy—they call it a payment—this year will be DM27 billion. That puts £16 billion, spread over 12 years, into perspective.

Mr. Gregory: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I shall give some European comparisons in due course. He, as a member of the Labour party, is not too happy to look at its record. Indeed, he must be embarrassed by its neglect of BR. It is only the Conservative Government who have honoured their commitments and properly invested in the railways.

We are about to increase BR's borrowing limit by more than £1 billion in 1991-92, and the Government have approved an increase of more than 20 per cent. to £600 million in the public service obligation for 1990-91. I am sorry that the shadow transport spokesman is not here; however, as always, I welcome his deputy. Had the shadow spokesman been present, I could have asked him how he wanted borrowings to increase, and whether he would approve of the Labour-controlled councils that have invested in such dubious banks as BCCI for one eighth of 1 per cent. more. It would be interesting to know whether he would suggest that as a blueprint for the private sector of the railway industry.

I have cited the solid investment programme under the Conservative Government. We must now ask whether there has been an increase in quality.

Mr. Snape: My point is not strictly relevant to the debate, but whenever we debate transport matters, the hon. Gentleman has an irresistible urge to make a fool of himself, and today has been no exception. Can he tell us how many left-wing socialists there are on the Shetland and Croydon councils, which together lost £30 million in BCCI?

Mr. Gregory: I regret giving way to the hon. Gentleman, because he is not advancing the matter of transport policy. Yet again the hon. Gentleman, who will shortly be returning to his occupation in the railway industry following the next election, shows that he has little understanding of finances, or he would not have got them so hopelessly wrong. I assume that he was referring not to a £30 million but to a £23 million loss in the Western Isles. He can further consider these issues when he returns to his full-time occupation in the railway industry.

The subject that we are debating is the railway industry, not the failure of Labour Members to read the financial press. I referred to the quality of management and of delivery in British Rail and how those relate to such considerable investment programmes. The House is being asked tonight to increase those investments.

Electrification is a splendid form of investment, and it is a tangible way to judge the money from the public purse that is going into BR. The east coast main line has taken £400 million of investment, yet with the new timetable that

was introduced on Monday it is now impossible for anyone from York or from the constituency of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to attend a function in London and return that evening, because the last train departs at 10 pm.

Although this week saw the introduction of the new InterCity 225 service on the 393-mile east coast line from London to Edinburgh—using the new class 91 Electra electric locomotives—we must ask whether we are getting an increased service. The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) mentioned European comparisons. I can draw examples from the excellent railway service that I have experienced in north America—a good way to show that BR can succeed with Amtrak. BR is letting down its passengers and its staff, and I shall give examples of that.

Mr. Adley: What conclusion would my hon. Friend draw from the fact that when the American passenger railways were in the private sector they were ghastly, but that is no longer the case now that they are owned by Amtrak, which is financed by the Federal Government?

Mr. Gregory: I am well aware that Amtrak has some public finances, but I would not agree that the services were ghastly before. However, that is a subjective view and I shall try to be as objective as I can.

Let us consider whether the quality of British Rail's management has improved as a result of the generosity of the public purse. British Rail does not only provide a railway system to go from A to B but, without going into the business of cattle trucks, it should provide a service for people such as the disabled. I welcome the speech of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes), but he dwelt a little unnecessarily on the physically disabled. I should have liked him to say a few words about British Rail's lack of interest in the blind and partially sighted because there are a number of cheap ways in which British Rail could make their life considerably easier. Its failure to do so may be because most of those who sit on the disability committee—excuse the pun—are in wheelchairs, not standing, and blind or partially sighted. I hope that that is a matter to which British Rail will address its mind shortly.

Let me examine the finances of the buffet facilities which, sadly, are still in state control. *[Interruption.]* Travellers' Fare is a wholly owned subsidiary of British Rail. On many routes, it is extremely slow to open, the major exception being on trains out of Paddington. I travel frequently on the east coast main line and its Travellers' Fare services often do not open until 20 or 30 minutes after the train has departed. If one goes up the train before it departs, one is in danger of seeing the staff waiting for the goods to come on board or interrupting some card game.

Once the buffet is open, many items that the public might like to purchase, such as KitKat, that excellent confectionery from my constituency, are not available, presumably because there is the danger that they would increase customer satisfaction or reduce the public service obligation. Such good brands of confectionery, or even those made in places such as Birmingham or Slough—I cannot recall the brands offhand—are not available.

There are long queues for the buffet, and one way to reduce them would be to provide vending machines so that those who simply want a hot or cold drink could obtain one without queueing for a wider range of services. However, that would increase customer satisfaction and so has been put at the bottom of British Rail's list.

Mr. Adley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gregory: Let me finish my point. My hon. Friend may be about to refer to those services which have been denationalised, such as the trolley service between Victoria and Gatwick, which is excellent. Not only does it take five different currencies—I am not referring to Scottish pound notes—but a range of drinks is available which it is almost impossible to find at Travellers' Fare. In addition, on no train in the United Kingdom is it possible to purchase a newspaper or a magazine. Such a service would also increase customer satisfaction and reduce the public service obligation. Those are two matters that are not at the top of British Rail's list of priorities.

Mr. Adley: The catering services on the Waterloo-Salisbury-Exeter line have been privatised, and a way has been found of getting rid of the queues after Salisbury by discontinuing the service because the girls have to go home to Bristol.

Mr. Gregory: It is important that this House starts its deliberations on time and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are mindful of the fact that on Monday to Thursday we start at 1430 hours. But for British Rail that would not necessarily be on time. Because British Railways Board members and senior executives are paid an overrider based on the percentage of trains that arrive on time, it is particularly important to them that the trains do arrive on time. Sadly, they found that their overrider beyond their salary was not very substantial, so they changed the definition of "on time". For inter-city trains to be on time now, they have to arrive within 20 minutes of the scheduled arrival time. That is not on time for my constituents; it is only on time for those who are deriving a percentage bonus. On time should mean literally on time, not a sloppy 20 minutes later, which helps no one. Let us have a bit of honesty and ensure that trains are on time and that those who are responsible for trains arriving on time receive the appropriate reward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch referred, not for the first time, with a little humour, to a citizens charter. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the first senior politician in Britain to devise a citizens charter, and he had British Rail very much in mind when he did so. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the few Opposition Members who are present agree.

Compensation is particularly appropriate with regard to British Rail. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and I travelled on the TGV to Lyons. Because the train was delayed, not for the first time, by the rail union of that country which has that facility, just as it does here, the guard came through the train giving compensation vouchers. There was no question of people having to queue up or write letters to SNCF. I have asked the previous chairman and the present chairman of British Rail to consider such a feature in order to encourage people if the service falls short of their high expectations.

That market-oriented approach is anathema to British Rail. The former chairman, for whom I have great regard, could not understand the concept, because he thought that everybody, except for the solicitor and the architect, could

[Mr. Gregory]

be retrained. He had been retrained a number of times. But, sadly, that aspect of marketing never came up for serious discussion.

Therefore, when my hon. Friend replies to this interesting debate, I hope that he will say whether, if we approve the higher investment tonight, we shall at the same time enter into a genuine contract between British Rail and the customer, whether that is the passenger or freight company. If British Rail falls short of such a contract, what genuine compensation would it offer? It should not take the form of the rather feeble letters that I have to pass on to many of my constituents; it should be genuine compensation which will encourage people to return to the service and to recommend it. There is nothing like proper compensation to attract people.

There is much lost opportunity at our railway stations. I will give two examples, the first of which is my constituency city of York. Its famous station was opened in 1877, and has been the beloved station of a number of poets and others. The station is approximately the size of Utrecht station in the Netherlands, but only recently has British Rail provided a few extra services. We now have a flower seller, one of the few in the city which is open on a Sunday. We have no banking facilities, in common with every station bar one in the United Kingdom. It is impossible to cash a cheque at any railway station except for one. There is a little cafeteria, but it has a limited menu.

Mr. Cryer: There are two.

Mr. Gregory: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman's definition of "cafeteria" extends so far. Utrecht station has 250 shops and offices; it is a whole complex, although it covers the same area as York station does. We want greater imagination from British Rail. British Rail does not have the staff to provide that imagination, but it has the expertise to go to outside agencies that could develop ideas for it. It could consult commercial estate agents and other developers who could enter partnership agreements to provide such assistance.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Does my hon. Friend recognise, as I do, that among the critics of British Rail are many people who in their professional lives have built, designed and operated railways in other countries? When they make suggestions to British Rail about how it can improve its operational performance, they meet a blank wall and deaf ears. British Rail does not recognise that anyone outside Euston house can understand railways better.

Mr. Gregory: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. At the risk of making a pun, I must say that British Rail tends to have tunnel vision. It believes that the only people who understand railways are those who have been steeped in them from the age of 16 or from immediately after the time they left university.

Important as it is for a certain group to understand engineering, signalling and maintenance, there are further opportunities for British Rail. It is not yet an albatross, despite the unhelpful comments made so frequently by the Federation of Railway Unions, which seeks to put British Rail into the dinosaur category. I continue to work to show that British Rail has a strong and serious future provided that it will enter a partnership with the private sector.

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gregory: We must stick to railway policy rather than get sidetracked, as we were before, by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East.

Mr. Snape *rose*——

Mr. Gregory: My second example concerns London. There is no difficulty in extending the range of services at railway stations in London. If British Rail is restricted at King's Cross or at Paddington, it can simply push the railway lines out by half a mile, one mile or two miles. A range of activities could be provided there, from bowling alleys and cinemas to restaurants and banking. If British Rail has any doubts, it could enter partnership agreements, as happens in other parts of the world and in the airlines. If British Rail has doubts on those matters, it could talk to the airlines and the airports. If we could get some synergy between the British Airports Authority and British Rail, we would move towards a far more customer-orientated railway industry.

The House and the public outside should be aware of the real danger to British Rail if it should ever again fall under a socialist Government. That is very unlikely, but as it is just a possibility, we should spell out that point. Labour has said that it will support the Bill tonight, but the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said that British Rail should be allowed to borrow from the private sector. He has not made it clear whether loans from the private sector would be cheaper or more expensive than loans from the national loans fund. Clearly they would be substantially more expensive. We must remember that, whether British Rail borrows from the public or the private sector, the debt is still a public sector one. As Sir Bob Reid, the chairman of British Rail, has said, investment in the railways is a social cost benefit to the public. That factor should be borne in mind when considering his comments to the Treasury in early July.

British Rail has already gone successfully down the path towards denationalisation. Those who have brothers or fathers some of whom are in British Rail whereas others are in British Rail Engineering do not find themselves torn between the two. The person coming home with a pay packet from British Rail Engineering has between one fifth and one quarter more—plus shares—than the person with similar experience and qualifications who works for British Rail has. British Rail will move in the direction of British Rail Engineering, once it moves down the path of denationalisation.

Under this Government, investment has been higher than it was in any year under the socialists. To be charitable, let us take Labour's most recent year in office, when it spent £537 million on the railways at 1990-91 prices. In the past year, the Conservatives have invested £834 million—or have allowed British Rail to invest that sum. Labour insists on maintaining the British Rail monopoly, which is clearly out of tune with the feeling in the European Community, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) will no doubt confirm. That is totally out of step with the rest of Europe.

The case for denationalisation could not be greater if we consider British Steel, British Telecom and British Leyland. They used to make losses on the same scale as British Rail has. I choose those examples carefully because they are companies of a similar size. Now that they have been denationalised, they are—surprise, surprise—all

making profits. On moral and economic grounds, the present subsidy to British Rail is excessive. It should be carefully targeted in terms of staff, so that they have shares for the first time.

If the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East has any doubts about that, he should ask his constituents who are employed by National Freight whether they want to go back to life under state control. They will make it clear to him that they are proud of their share certificates. They frame them, just as they will frame their shares in British Rail in due course.

Safety is another element. I referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch in connection with the manning in the cab. By a curious twist of logic, British Rail says that two men must be in the cab of an inter-city train. When I have been in the cab of such a train, the second person has done almost no work. The case for having a second person is not convincing for the inter-city services, but it is convincing for the regional network, which is now far more complicated and does not have all the safety devices that inter-city services have. If we are to have that overmanning, it should be on the regional railways and not on inter-city services. We should address our minds to that.

I commend the Bill to the House, with the reservations that I have expressed. I look forward to a new era for the railways which is customer-orientated and which truly recognises staff commitment and responsibility.

7.28 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Although I have some criticisms of British Rail, it is worth placing on record the fact that there have been substantial improvements in the quality of railway services and some significant changes in the atmosphere and approach of the railway system and its staff. Like many hon. Members—although unfortunately not all—I travel many thousands of miles a month on British Rail and I have a pretty wide experience of what happens. I travel from Berwick-upon-Tweed to London—I will come to the new timetable in a moment—a journey that enables me to walk out of my house and to be in the centre of London just over four hours later, having had a comfortable journey and having done four hours' work in the process.

I am almost invariably on time, although having said that, I shall probably be late on my next two or three journeys. It is the ill luck of many of my constituents who make only occasional journeys to find that theirs is the train that is an hour late on a four-hour journey, whereas in the high sample of rail journeys from which I have to draw, there is a high proportion of journeys that I complete on time and sometimes early.

I have also noted significant improvements on my cross-country journeys. For many years, I crossed the Pennines on filthy trains, with grossly inadequate timetables and no hope of a cup of tea; now the rolling stock is much better, the service is more frequent and a private-enterprise trolley travels up and down the train regularly. The change in attitudes, and the combination of public and private-sector effort, has greatly improved many other services as well.

On my travels, I meet many dedicated British Rail staff who go out of their way to try to ensure that passengers are well catered for, and that when things go wrong every possible effort is made to help. That does not always happen, but it happens often enough to be worthy of note. Another welcome development is the arrival on delayed trains of British Rail staff carrying mobile telephones for the use of customers who will be unduly delayed.

I am slightly worried about the possibility that "sectorisation" will make it increasingly difficult for staff at the main terminal stations to make use of resources to deal with such difficult circumstances. Staff who would, in the past, use the resources of another sector have expressed anxiety to me about this. It may no longer be easy, for instance, to use a regional railway's diesel train, or to run an InterCity train to complete a journey on which a transfer to a regional service might otherwise have been necessary. Any move that cramps BR staff's initiative and their ability to cope when things are going badly is regrettable, and I hope that BR will continue to encourage those who still cling to the old attitudes to change their approach.

Despite the improvements that I have observed, there is still a serious lack of attention to passenger needs, even at times of major investment. That was brought home to me by my experience of the new east coast main-line timetable. At the beginning of this week, I had to set out for London 20 minutes earlier than I did under the previous timetable to catch the first train of the day, in order to arrive no earlier than I would have done on the old diesel-hauled 125. I boarded a new electric train that was due to arrive 20 minutes later than the diesel train that had run in the previous week.

When the train reached Newcastle, it broke down, because the staff could not shut the automatic doors; that was on the second day of the new timetable. I switched to a fast train, which enabled me to reach my destination no sooner than I could have done before the introduction of electrification. That does not strike me as a major step forward.

Mr. Adley: The hon. Gentleman should not complain about the east coast main line. He should accompany me on the Waterloo-Salisbury-Exeter line when I go home. The fastest train now takes six minutes longer to get from Waterloo to Salisbury than the same service took in 1964, the last full year of steam operation, when the train was pulled by a Merchant Navy Pacific engine.

Mr. Beith: Many such examples could be given. My complaint about the east coast main line timetable—which I hope will be improved in subsequent editions—is that the opportunities for improvement provided by electrification have not been directed at all the areas from which customers emerge, and in which fresh business can be secured by means of effective marketing. Certainly passengers from the borders are getting a fairly raw deal at peak times; they are also finding that the last train from London to Berwick leaves not at 8 pm—as they were promised when the sleeper services were withdrawn—but at 6.30 pm, and that the last train from Edinburgh to Berwick on Saturdays leaves at 7 pm, which makes it impossible for passengers to take the train to attend any evening event in Edinburgh.

Following electrification, overnight services have returned to the east coast main line. Once a week, on Friday nights, it is possible to take an overnight train from Edinburgh, Berwick or Newcastle, to London. Of course, it is not possible to lie down in a sleeping car; that would be too much to expect. Passengers must sit up for the

[Mr. Beith]

whole journey. British Rail has shown that it is possible to reintroduce overnight services, but has not done the obvious—that is, run a proper service to Edinburgh with sleeping cars, and gain the extra business that is there to be obtained from the borders and from Tyneside

The Secretary of State knows that very well, because he travels regularly to Edinburgh in the sleeper. I cannot get into my sleeper compartment for the television crews that follow the right hon. and learned Gentleman nowadays to provide background film to accompany his statements. I am glad, however, that he is a regular rail traveller: as such, he probably realises how absurd it was to withdraw all the sleeper services from the east coast main line. It would be perfectly possible to run one of the Scottish sleepers through Tyneside and the borders.

British Rail's failure to honour its promise in that regard constitutes a standing warning to passengers never to believe what it says when it wants to get private Bills through the House. I shall issue the same warning in respect of every private Bill that BR introduces until its meets that undertaking.

I shall say more about regional services in my part of the world later in my speech. First, let me deal with the financial core of the Bill. In real terms, direct Government support for the railways is now 40 per cent. below the 1983 level, according to British Rail's annual report. Investment has been hopelessly constricted: the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) mentioned the "bunching" of investment and the long periods in which no significant investment was made.

Because of that, many opportunities have been missed. This country did not develop the high-speed TGV service on a dedicated line; France did. We have been hanging about rather than making a decision on direct links with Europe and the new line to the channel tunnel, which baffles other European countries: as other hon. Members have pointed out, they cannot understand why we have not leapt at the opportunity to ensure that we have direct links not only with the south-east, but with the north, Scotland and Wales. By that means, we could attract freight on to the system by offering a rapid, direct journey, and also ensure that freight terminal facilities were available in the areas from which the business would come. Because of the current indecision, there is no prospect of a proper freight terminal to serve Tyneside, for example.

In recent years, there have been endless delays in the replacement of commuter and provincial stock, to the enormous discomfort of those who travel into London and some of our other conurbations. That discomfort is relieved only by the efforts of some passenger transport authorities, which have spent a fair amount on building up commuter services in co-operation with British Rail.

The kind of investment practice that we have seen for many years certainly will not secure the transport system whose desirability has been implicit in the Secretary of State's speeches ever since he came to office. We all welcome the tone of what he has been saying, but we want that to be borne out in the financial structure that he gives the railways. According to the current edition of *Modern Railways*:

"The Transport Secretary's recent speech was a cleanly-executed piece of public relations, and at the very least, it is significant that he feels what he said to be politically necessary. But the railways will not improve just because he has declared that it is OK to favour them.

The big missing link in the Transport Secretary's declaration on rail transport is a willingness to assess all forms of transport on a common basis."

We know perfectly well from previous debates that the rail passenger is being asked to contribute more of the infrastructure costs of his journey than is the road passenger, who notices very little marginal cost arising from his decision to make that particular journey by road. That distorts the objective that the Secretary of State has set out, and, indeed, prevents the achievement of that objective.

It makes environmental sense for us to attract more and more people to travel by rail rather than driving. It makes more sense in conurbations, but the principle is not confined to them. It also makes environmental sense for us to carry a much larger proportion of our freight by rail, and the investment structure must be built up to meet those needs.

Various of my hon. Friends favour specific projects on which they will wish to press the Secretary of State: one example in the extension of electrification to Aberdeen. We can all cite examples of projects that ought to be undertaken. I suspect that that will require far more investment than the Bill contemplates.

Much was said earlier about privatisation and its implications for the railway system. We take the view that the railway system needs to be opened up to more providers of services. The principle of the common network being available to more providers is appropriate, just as it is appropriate for telecommunications and other services where, until now, there has been a public service monopoly. We see considerable attractions in identifying ways in which new operators can be brought into the railway system.

The idea is not foreign to the railway system. Private trains are running about now, carrying both freight and passengers on the network. That concept could be developed extensively. It will be necessary to retain a publicly owned and managed network on which the services run. The Secretary of State asked the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East whether the concept that I am advancing is supported by him.

However, the Secretary of State has not answered questions put to him as to his views about the future of the network. Does he believe that we need to retain a publicly-owned and managed basic network for the railway system, or does he believe that the entire system can be privatised? Our judgment, reached on the basis of our studies so far, is that a publicly managed system is likely to continue to be needed but that there is extensive scope for private enterprise activity on the network.

The public service obligation grant goes to the heart of the Bill's provisions. For some years, public service obligation money has been the subject of a reducing target. The original plan was to reduce it in 1992-93 to £345 million. The Bill refers to a figure of over £400 million, which shows that the Government recognise that that target cannot be achieved. If the regional railway system, that provides cross-country and rural services, is to be faced with a declining level of public support every year, what will happen is what is now happening.

Railway managers will say that there is only one way in which they can cope—by contracting the network. However, the network cannot be contracted without

closures being proposed and without going through all the machinery that is involved in closure proposals. The Government do not want to be seen to be a Government who close railways. They do not want the Beeching tag hanging round their neck.

Managers of regional railways have found an answer to that—to cut down services on large parts of the network to the point where nobody can use them. They are turned into completely unusable services, or they are reduced to such a level that they cost the absolute minimum. Resources are then concentrated on areas where the largest number of people live. In that way, the managers have some hope of increasing their returns.

If regional railways are run like that, the public service obligation is not discharged in the way that was originally intended. The principle underlying that obligation was that a basic network of cross-country and rural railways ought to be retained. The public service obligation refers to that broad network being maintained, and is not now being maintained.

This is not a political point, put forward by me as the Liberal Democrat spokesman. It is the view trenchantly expressed by the Central Transport Consultative Committee, which is extremely concerned about what is happening to the rural network. The Central Transport Consultative Committee considers that the direction given to British Railways—to operate its passenger service so as to provide a public service broadly comparable generally with that provided by the board at present—was intended as a benchmark, below which grant-supported services must not fall. The committee points out that the services are falling well below that level and it lists services where there have been reductions of 50 per cent. or more below the level stated when the direction was given, which was as recently as 1988. It points out that in many rural areas the frequency has been dramatically reduced.

I can give the Secretary of State the most ghastly examples from my constituency. During the last three years, a stopping service of trains on the east coast main line, serving stations at Chathill, Alnmouth, Widdrington, Pegswood and Acklington, has been reduced by one train a year. There were only four trains to start with, so there is only one more year to go before we reach zero. The northbound train service on that line has been reduced by one train every year. It is now impossible to travel from Chathill station northwards to Scotland, even by using a connecting train at Berwick, and return to Chathill on the same day. As there is only one train, one has to return to Chathill the following day. Moreover, it is impossible to travel to Chathill by train and return from it that day. One can travel there by train only in the evening.

Chathill station is provided with a postbus connection —an efficient bit of transport co-ordination to which the Post Office and the local authority are committed, and that has been very successful in enabling people from the coastal areas of Seahouses and Bamburgh to use that rail service. However, that service is now hopeless because there is no train with which the postbus can connect. British Rail says, "By taking away the trains that we were using on that service, we can get more passengers on to the stock by using it in urban Tyneside." Surely, however, the objective of the public service obligation was to ensure that a basic network continued to be available. It cannot be set absolutely in stone, but the regional network is now being cut wholesale in order to meet impossible obligations.

The Secretary of State should consider it in terms that he would find congenial or agreeable—in terms of performance obligations and performance measurements. There is no performance measurement now for regional railways when it comes to providing rural services. There is not even a benchmark—that a basic service should be retained. The Government shouled not dole out very large subsidies without there being some sort of performance measurement against which the subsidy that is given can be measured. But that is what is happening now. A large subsidy is given to a whole network without any assessment of whether the network as a whole is being maintained. I sought to amend the Bill to include such an obligation.

In your other capacity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as Chairman of Ways and Means, you felt unable to select those amendments to the Bill. We therefore face the dilemma of whether to vote against individual clauses that deal with the public service obligation. That may be the only way to get the point across. It does not make sense to continue a public service obligation grant that is not measured against whether the network for which it is being provided is still there and still provides a reasonable and recognisable level of service.

Mr. Snape: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when Ministers are asked about this practice, it is unfair for them to say, "These matters are entirely ones that should be answered by British Rail"? The House has great difficulty in obtaining information from a Department that, due to its own financial noose, causes these cuts yet declines to accept responsibility for them in this place.

Mr. Beith: Absolutely. The Secretary of State has placed British Rail in the position that it can run regional railways only on the basis of retrenchment—on the basis of concentrating rolling stock in such a way as to obtain the maximum return. British Rail is the originator of the policy. It may say that that is not what it wants—that it has its own ideas about what can be achieved. In that case, why are the Government telling British Rail and the House what that basis is? I shall be happy to give way to the Secretary of State if he wishes to intervene to clarify the point.

What is the point of having a Central Transport Consultative Committee if the Secretary of State takes no notice of what it says on the subject? It has written to him at considerable length and made public statements, but we are getting no further. The committee has gone into considerable detail about the performance targets that should apply to British Rail in relation to its rural services, but it has received no response. It says:

> "The CTCC is disappointed with the Department's interpretation of the PSO direction. It seems to give BR the right to reduce a train service on a particular line or at a particular station to the bare minimum to avoid closure proceedings, irrespective of the social need which that service satisfies and for which BR receives grant. The CTCC believes that situation to be most unsatisfactory and one which must be tackled by future legislation."

This is a legislative opportunity. Do Ministers intend that British Rail should meet its target by cutting to a minimum the services on the more extended parts of the rural network, thereby meeting the obligation of reducing the public service grant? Is that the plan, or do Ministers intend that the rural service network should remain at broadly the same level as now? I should like the service extended in some areas and more stations to be opened. It

[Mr. Beith]

has been demonstrated in some of the passenger transport authority areas that new business can be achieved by that, and the same could take place on some of the rural lines. However, currently everything is going in the opposite direction.

It is not reasonable to ask the House to approve the increases in the public service obligation, which is one part of the Bill, without explaining what the money is to pay for, what obligations arise from it and what the Government's policy is. The Bill sets out only the limits. it does not set out what the Government will give in PSO grants, just the maximum that they are allowed to give.

The Minister who has day-to-day responsibility for the railways has returned to the Chamber. He must tell us his response to the views of the Central Transport Consultative Committee on the issue that affects rural railway users in Northumberland and Wales, including the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) and other hon. Members in mid-Wales and in the south-west and all over the country where services are being severely damaged. It is not reasonable to ask the House to approve the Bill without dealing with such questions.

7.51 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I was reassured by the opening remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. It is encouraging to see increased investment in railways and an increase in competition in railway services. It is pleasing to learn that the monopoly that British Rail has enjoyed and exploited over the years is likely to be broken by private enterprise opportunities opening up and, ultimately, by denationalisation. In addition, there is the encouraging thought that we now have a more positive freight policy on rail, as opposed to roads, than we have had for many years.

Given the welcome signs that are the background to the Bill, it is a pity that the one great investment opportunity, perhaps the greatest opportunity of the century—the channel tunnel and its rail link—has been so mishandled by British Rail. It has failed to rise to the challenge. The transportation of freight and the communication of passengers with other parts of Europe has been handled in a cack-handed way. If British Rail's proposals for the channel tunnel rail link are introduced, they will make Britain a branch line of the rest of Europe rather than part of the main line.

I shall outline the deficiencies and failures of British Rail's proposed route, how it fails to rise to the opportunities offered by the Bill and how alternatives could meet those requirements in a much better way.

British Rail has sought to impose a channel tunnel rail link that goes no further than London. It pays lip service to going beyond King's Cross, but, by and large, it will represent a buffer stop for passengers. Those who travel to the west country will have to go from King's Cross to Paddington under their own arrangements and then use other parts of British Rail for the rest of their journey. If one is trying to attract passengers to travel from all parts of the United Kingdom by rail instead of by road or air, it is nonsense if there is no proper network of through trains allowing passengers to travel without stopping in London to change trains.

That is culpable enough, but, worse than that, British Rail has made no real provision for freight. It intends to superimpose a freight route on existing commuter routes in the south-east. British Rail is not offering a freight policy, but is using the slack time on commuter routes. That is no way to encourage those who ship from the north of Scotland to the south of Italy to use a train or a rail container rather than road. Until that matter is seized by those who operate the service now or who will operate it in the future, particularly the channel tunnel link, rail will never command the commercial and financial support that it should have.

British Rail's proposals seem merely to link the King's Cross area of London with the capitals of Europe. It will offer an opportunity for passengers covering that distance, but precious little else. The reason for that planning may have been dominated by the development aspect. There is no doubt that the opportunity to exploit the development potential around King's Cross has been fully investigated by British Rail.

I have no knowledge of precise details, but we can surmise that, if an office development were to be built on top of a terminal linking King's Cross with Paris, Brussels and the other capitals of continental Europe, the value of such accommodation would be increased by a factor of three or four. So, what is worth £x per sq ft now could be worth £4x after the development. Think of the advantages to any European or international company if its employees could simply go down in the lift from their office to the platform below and travel straight to the heart of Europe without the hassle of travelling to Heathrow, Gatwick or even City airport. That would greatly enhance the property development value of King's Cross.

I have no reason to know this, but perhaps the reason for British Rail's preoccupation with a terminal at King's Cross with precious few facilities for through trains beyond King's Cross is dominated by the desire to exploit to the best advantage the land around that area.

British Rail's outlined route fails on three main criteria that should apply. First, it is commercially and financially unattractive. The private investor partners who linked with British Rail in an attempt to reach a partnership agreement to build the King's Cross southern route dropped out because they found it commercially and financially unsustainable. Secondly, operationally it is of no great benefit. In terms of passenger time, the direct link to King's Cross saves perhaps 12 or, at best, 20 minutes. That is a small amount of time when one considers what an alternative could offer. Also, as I have mentioned, it makes no provision for freight, which will trundle around the existing commuter lines.

Thirdly, and perhaps most damaging, the proposed line is environmentally disastrous. It would cause much damage, not only to the heritage, farmland and landscape of Kent, but, when it passed through Warwick gardens in my constituency and on to King's Cross, it would cause the maximum disturbance and devastation to the area. The cost of mitigating that environmental damage is out of all proportion to the benefit that would be gained by following that route.

British Rail has chosen the worst proposals to meet the challenge. We are debating a railway for the 21st century and how we ensure that the United Kingdom, although separated from it by the Channel, can nevertheless have a direct rail link with the rest of continental Europe. British Rail has failed to recognise the opportunities and to meet

that challenge. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State promised that increased investment will lead to an improved service and that the rail system will be subject to competition and private enterprise. The channel tunnel offers him perhaps the best opportunity to fulfil those promises.

Alternative routes have been proposed that can be built de novo and do not superimpose themselves on existing lines. More than one alternative route is under consideration, but I shall highlight the main points of what might be called the Ove Arup concept, which is a way of linking Folkestone with London—the capital link is important—without pushing all passenger or freight traffic through the bottlenecks of central London or King's Cross. The Ove Arup route goes through parts of north-east Kent that are regarded as the under-privileged areas of the south-east, which could do with some economic uplift and where flagging industries would benefit from the increased investment and opportunities that would flow from the link.

The line would continue through south-east Essex—another area that would benefit from economic uplift—to Stratford. Trains travelling to the west would continue to King's Cross, Paddington, Heathrow, Bristol, the south-west, the north-west and Wales. People in Cardiff could board a train and get off in Paris, Brussels or Milan without changing in London.

Passengers travelling to the north would not need to travel to King's Cross, as their train would go straight through Stratford and up to the north-east, the north-west and Scotland. That would avoid pushing freight and passenger traffic through central London.

Building that route de novo offers an opportunity to build a dedicated freight route alongside it. I recently asked Ministers whether BR's arrangements for freight traffic are compatible—whether the track and wagon gauge are compatible with European systems. If the route is to link the United Kingdom with continental Europe, trains must be able to run without transferring their loads or stopping in sidings. The alternative routes offer advantages that British Rail's preferred route does not.

I mentioned the development opportunities at King's Cross, which no doubt British Rail has assessed and will seek to exploit. Similar opportunities arise at Stratford, which is near the major development at docklands. Industry and enterprise in docklands would have easier access to the channel tunnel link. Stratford offers passengers the opportunity to park and ride, as they can at the airport, but certainly could not at King's Cross, or what is now called the kiss-and-ride syndrome—one says goodbye to granny or the children but later can pick them up near where they get off the train.

We should seize that opportunity now, because if we make the wrong decision not only we but many generations will suffer. It will be an inconvenience for us now, but disastrous for the long-term economic prospects of not only London and docklands but, more important, of the whole of the United Kingdom. If the opportunity is missed now, it is missed for ever.

I welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, but I urge him most seriously to consider the opportunities that lie beyond the vision of British Rail and to ensure that the whole of the United Kingdom becomes part of continental Europe. I commend the Bill in those terms.

8.7 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be relieved to hear that I shall be brief.

We have had an even-tempered and good debate. The lesson to be drawn from it is that the future of the railways is of extraordinary importance. The publications that the Secretary of State for Transport has issued show that, on a cross-party basis and throughout the world, it is regarded as the alternative to our choked road system.

I hope that the discussion will not obsess itself with whether the rail system should be nationalised or privatised, but will concentrate on ensuring that our rail system is efficient, safe and, if possible, cheap. Geographically, Britain is on the periphery of Europe—Wales and Scotland are literally on the periphery of Europe. It is vital that we have the direct links that the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) mentioned.

The problem that is faced by my constituents and many others in the former mining valleys of south Wales is how we ensure that we continue to enjoy the services of a commuter rail system. Much of the area's population, perhaps 1 million people, use that excellent service, which is distinguished by a young female manager, the imaginative Alison Ingram. She has some good ideas about the future of that rail system. It is difficult to apply normal financial criteria to what is essentially a commuter system.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) did the rail service a great service by drawing the House's attention to the false comparisons which are frequently made between the competitiveness of the railways with the roads. I was glad that he brought to our attention the hidden costs of road transport. I hope that the Minister for Public Transport, who, I know, cares a great deal about the railways, will bear that in mind when he replies.

Such false comparisons always detract from the value that we place on our railways. That comparison is crucial if we are to take as seriously as we should the environmental superiority of the railways over any other form of public transport. No matter which party is in power, it will be difficult for us to break off our love affair with cars and the easy accessibility so often offered by road transport to factories, villages and supermarkets. However, we must make some fundamental decisions now.

The hon. Member for Dulwich drew our attention to a decision that is of supreme importance at least in terms of our links with Europe. I should like the western half of Britain to be saved the pain of going through a certain London bottleneck. I am sure that many hon. Members know the Reading-Redhill-Ashford line. It needs upgrading, and I understand that there are some difficulties with Redhill station, but the sums needed to modify the line are very small when compared to those spent by other European countries. The same applies to the possible Stratford-King's Cross line, and the way in which British Rail management is, I suspect, forced to skimp on any of its imaginative projections is laughable.

I remember when British Rail management were brought before the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. We asked them to describe to us—because we could not get a clear picture—how somebody would travel from Cardiff to Paris during the day. We were told that that person would get on a train in Cardiff, travel to Paddington, pick up his cases and then get on the Circle line, which would,

[Dr. Kim Howells]

of course, be vastly improved by that time. The groans of disappointment and the guffaws were louder than the noise of a 125 diesel pulling out of Cardiff station. The notion that everyone west of London has to travel in that way to get to Paris is an insult to an area which has been one of the great growth areas of the economy in the past 10 to 15 years.

We must think seriously and urgently if we are to avoid falling into the trap of short termism and of trying to upgrade only the main London railway terminals to take this huge step forward.

There have been worrying tendencies in south Wales to try to eke out the public sector obligation grant by cutting early-morning and late-night services. Having spoken to the management in south Wales, I can understand why it is trying to do that, but it detracts from the overall service offered in areas such as south Wales. If we start lopping off services at either end of the day, we may end up in a position similar to that which existed in the mining villages. We said that as long as we took off the uneconomic tail, we would be left with a profitable middle sector, but, inevitably, we were left with nothing—south Wales now has two pits. We do not want to be left with two rail services a day to Pontypridd or Treherbert, but there are alternatives.

I hope that the Minister will consider carefully the suggestions made to me by British Rail management in Cardiff. It was suggested that one solution might be to substitute its own buses for trains in the early morning and late at night. That could be done at a fraction of the cost of running trains at that time because of difficulties with timetabling and signalling. Management said that they could not do that because they did not have the power of their German and Swiss equivalents, which can run buses. I should have thought that it would be a sensible extension of British Rail's powers to allow them that flexibility.

It is difficult for some of the valley communities, and, I am sure, for many rural communities elsewhere, to find a substitute form of transport. We often end up throwing people back on to the roads. We say that we want to cut down on pollution from cars and to reduce the whole of the car economy which is such an environmental problem, yet at the same time we fail to recognise that we must allow British Rail—or whatever it will be called in the future—to be flexible enough to overcome those central economic difficulties early in the morning and late at night.

The Minister is also aware that we are unhappy about our service in south Wales. Signalling, the conditions of many railway stations and on-line services need to be much improved. Although I disagreed with much of what the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) said, he put his finger on a number of points which need special attention. Railway stations need to be refurbished and the quality of service on trains needs to continue to be improved.

For example, many improvements are needed at Cardiff station. I mention one of the more light-hearted problems; it is less urgent but it is immensely irritating. When I get off the 125 diesel and cross to the platform from which trains leave for the valleys, my ears are assaulted by the wonderful plummy tones of someone who says, "Welcome to the velleys lines". That is not how the valleys are known in south Wales. The same applies to the stations enumerated by the announcer. He says, in his plummy tones, "The train about to depart goes to Treherbert and Bargoed." It would be nice if we did not feel that such an alien presence was directing us from one platform or one train to another.

Mr. Wolfson: I hope that British Rail will take to heart what the hon. Gentleman says and will use his voice as an alternative.

Dr. Howells: I hope that my majority is not that thin.

On a more serious point, many of the people who use the valleys lines work in Cardiff and along the M4 corridor. The economy and the social economy of south Wales have changed dramatically over the past 30 years and especially over the past 10 or 15 years. We do not have as many community-based employers as we did. The pits have largely gone, as have many of the manufacturing plants in the valleys. Increasingly, investment is being concentrated along the M4 corridor. That is where the jobs are, and that is where people want to get to.

I am sure that the Minister is well aware that one of our great problems is that, because of the topography of the valleys—the physical restrictions—it is impossible to build any more roads there. We have had a dualled A470 for quite a long time now. It is highly congested, with constant traffic jams and attendant delays and such congestion adds considerably to the costs of road-borne traffic. To the communities of south Wales, that is a crucial question, because we are trying to reduce our unit costs. Our road transport firms have performed valiantly in trying to negotiate inadequate roads in the valleys and the eternal bottleneck of the Severn bridge—and I am glad that the construction of the new bridge is to start shortly. I would only say, about time too.

We must realise that we cannot go on filling the valleys with roads, not least because the people do not want them and because communities such as mine suffer badly. Places such as Talbot Green, Llantrisant and Taff's Well are choked with traffic. I hope that the Government will take that on board and will realise that the alternative is to launch a series of imaginative initiatives, some of which will cost money, to attract people and heavy goods on to the railways and off the roads.

I know that the Minister is very much concerned with the problem. I am sure that he is aware that all kinds of experiments are taking place in Germany—for example, with tax breaks and new technologies. The Germans are only just starting, I do not think that they are much further advanced than we are. I must say that some of the proposals that I have heard from British Rail and from private concerns about how the swap-over from road to rail might take place are extremely interesting, and at least as imaginative as those that I came across in Germany with the hon. Member for Christchurch.

Ours is a very good rail service—certainly in terms of the amount of cash that we make available to it. The German rolling stock that we saw was certainly of no better quality than British rolling stock, and much of it was of inferior quality. In many ways, British Rail management has done an excellent job, but we must realise, that it is the Government who hold the purse strings. It is the Government who have their hands on the rope round British Rail's neck. If they care to loosen it and to encourage BR—and I am glad to hear encouraging noises—we may well see that changeover take place: a whole new generation of rail transport may be helped to

supersede the great problems on our roads. I hope that the Minister will continue in that direction, and that the new age of railways will take off.

8.23 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): This has been an interesting debate, in which there has been a meeting of minds on a number of salient points. I had some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) said about plummy tones on stations—albeit that it was not perhaps one of his most important points. The LRT network is not part of the subject of today's debate, but the House will know that we in London are very familiar with the immortal announcement, "Mind the gap", usually delivered in very plummy old-Etonian tones. I am sure that people's voices are not normally like that. The voices on the southern region are often very Roedean or very Eton in tone.

"Mind the gap" is an important injunction for both Government and Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. There is still an enormous gap in respect of the ideas and proposals on transport and rail policies for the future. "Mind the gap" is also a useful admonition for the Government. The danger is that we are still seemingly rather half-hearted about our railway policy. Yet I detect the first stages of a change of mind on the Government's part—it was alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) in his excellent speech—and that is welcome. At the same time, the Government seem to be nervous and hesitant about going further. I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for their work in beginning to restore—and then to increase—the morale of British Rail management. That is an important task, and we are a long way from completing it.

Many of BR's long-distance services—and, indeed, its other services—are very good. We all have a tendency to knock the rail network, probably excessively. Moreover, the Government are hesitant when it comes to providing the enormous resources that are needed in terms of investment capital. Having said that, I recognise that the Government have made some substantial increases in investment resources and the Bill is an expression of that.

All that is very welcome, but we are not there yet. When I visit other European countries, I note that there is a totally different psychological attitude towards railways as a system of internal transport. Perhaps, in future, we shall have slightly transmogrified monopolies. Incidentally, it is not right to pray in aid the Commission's attitude to policy formation in respect of internal transport policy. That is not its function. The function of the Commission in Brussels is to try to achieve a co-ordinated single market in transport policy, which involves it in what happens across frontiers, in what is done by way of intermodal developments and more intensive co-ordination of the different national railway systems and perhaps, therefore, in bringing in more private operations. The Commission is certainly not saying that privatisation in all the individual member states would be a good thing.

It would also be a gross exaggeration to suggest that other national Governments are thinking in terms of privatisation on a major scale. They may be thinking of reducing the monopoly in an operational practical sense. They may be thinking of other operators coming in with the national central railway system on a greater scale. I note the amusing example from Switzerland, where I gather no substantial changes are proposed, but where it is planned to let MacDonalds run some of the rolling restaurant cars. It would be daft to cite that as an example of major privatisation. I do not think that any of the political parties, including the centrist and Christian Democrat parties, have concluded that privatisation is an indispensable part of any future policy.

We all want a heavily invested national railway asset. That is especially true in Britain, which has fallen behind some other countries, and in Germany, which benefits particularly from the advantages of a dense network. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, who has visited the Bundesbahn, will agree with me that the Germans are now beginning to worry about the cost of the network and the size of the deficit, yet the network makes a direct contribution to the development of the German gross domestic product. One cannot say that our railway system makes such a contribution. BR management would like to do that, but they have been prevented by circumstances, including ideological circumstances, from doing so in recent years. That is a great tragedy for Britain.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend is right that the Germans are worried, but they are worried because, with the amalgamation of east and west Germany, they are faced with the prospect of having to build a virtually completely new lateral railway system. What is causing the problem is the amount of investment that that will involve.

Mr. Dykes: That is right, although I suppose one might say, amusingly, that the incorporation of the five new Länder into the Federal Republic amounted to the Deutsche bank having the world's biggest rights issue and deciding to use the West German Government as the means to do it.

Enormous amounts of capital will be needed to bring the Reichsbahn network from east Germany into the Federal railway system—something that is scheduled to happen in two years' time. I have the feeling that the Germans will tackle that problem and raise the capital. I think that they will accept the capital deficit that that will entail as well as the operating deficit on German railways. The Germans will regard the development as a direct positive contribution to the development of their economy. In that sense, investment in the railways is better than many other forms of public sector investment. The Germans do not say, "The railways must make a profit." In Britain, we have reduced the steel industry to half its previous output level. It is one of the smallest steel industries, in a nation with a population of 50 million.

We could all find ways of reducing the railway network and making it fabulously profitable on current account. We could probably do that by having five lines. The smaller the network, the more profitable it becomes in economic terms, but does it serve the nation? Of course my hon. Friend the Minister knows that it does not, even if he will not agree with me now. I detect the beginnings of a major psychological change. This is not the ancien regime. For some reason, the previous Prime Minister did not like railways. I did not have a chance to discuss it with her. However, the new Cabinet is pro-railway and that is witnessed by the Bill which I heartily support and by the change of attitude. Perhaps in future there will be a

[Mr. Dykes]

"Malcolm Rifkind plaza" at Waverley station or a "Roger Freeman plaza" before Euston station as the new commitment unfolds. However, that will mean a lot more money.

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dykes: I will give way reluctantly.

Mr. Snape: And I intervene equally reluctantly. Before the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), in his eloquent way, hails this new golden age of railways, we should allow reality to intrude for a moment. Without the Bill, BR would be virtually bankrupt by mid-summer. There is no real alternative and there has been no great conversion just yet.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) obviously was not listening carefully to me earlier. He was talking animatedly to his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) to ensure that he says the right thing when he speaks later. If he had listened more carefully, he would have heard me say that the Bill is the first small step for mankind and that it is welcome. However, a lot more needs to be done.

Not withstanding the sympathy that we feel for my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) about the channel tunnel rail link route, the time that it is taking to decide on the route is alarming. It is also alarming to hear our friends on the continent asking what the Government and BR's management are doing to our railway system. I am reluctant to blame the BR management. They have coped almost heroically with enormously adverse circumstances and restrictions and with the atmosphere of hostility.

I do not believe that many of my Conservative colleagues are mad about the privatisation of the railways. They want an efficient network and more capital devoted to the railways. They would probably welcome the intermodal competition of private enterprise providing services with BR. The linkage between road haulage, freight and trains is crucial and it must be achieved properly. That is one of the preoccupations of the European Commission. However, that is very different from saying that if BR is privatised and run by Lord Hanson or Gerald Ronson——

Mr. Adley: If that were the case, one would never get from Wandsworth to Brixton.

Mr. Dykes: I will resist the temptation to comment on that.

We know that it would be a nightmare if there was a 19th-century, old-fashioned capitalist approach to railways. That is one way of running the system down. I welcome the change of attitude. That attitude was mirrored by the reference of the hon. Member for Pontypridd to people being addicted to their motor cars. That idea no longer grips people as it used to.

People like to use their cars these days for holidays, on essential journeys and for journeys where there is no railway or bus alternative. However, people now realise the negative aspects of such a policy. They want a railway network that will serve the needs of the next two decades. I believe that our ministerial team can provide that if they are given the opportunity and the financial resources. Although I may be guessing, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that that is the Government's positive attitude.

That policy must be pursued for many reasons, not least to protect the environment. We are aware of the short-sighted policies of the past few decades involving the glorification of the motor car and the attendant problems for cities and country routes. Motorways have not provided the solution as they should have done according to the sacred laws of the famous French economist Jean Say and the provision of extra capacity.

Perhaps we should be more consensual in the House. It is extraordinary that it is considered to be immoral and wicked to have consensus in this Parliament. At every European parliamentary debate I have attended, I have seen people on both sides nodding in agreement, including the Government and Opposition representatives. I am sure that it is difficult for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East to understand that, because he must always fight. However, consensus is the way forward for such a complicated policy. Agreement produces policy stances as well as management efficiency. That must be led by the politicians.

There is no way in which even a free enterprise-oriented Government can stand back and tell a railway management to do what it likes. Ultimately, the money comes from the public sector and, therefore, the Government are heavily involved. Even if there is more of a stand-off posture, the management must manage, but the guidelines for future railway policy depend on the Government's attitude and support for it among the public.

The channel tunnel project was the greatest transport project in history and it was privately funded. I pay tribute to everyone involved in it, but we now need public sector finance to surround it, especially in the south-east, to ensure that it is a great success. The project shows that the public and private sectors can go together if we strip out ideological prejudices and reach a rational railway policy for the future. The sooner we achieve that, the more we will be able to keep up with the others.

We cannot always insist on being behind other European countries as the single market develops. Do we want to be the only country in Europe with a different currency with regard to the ecu and the single currency?

Mr. Cryer: We are beginning to diverge now.

Mr. Dykes: I am finishing now, so there is no need for the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) to become excited.

A foreign visitor might arrive at Dover and discover that he will travel at only 32 mph to London when he has just stepped off the French TGV. Must we be the only European country to have antiquated trains?

Mr. Adley: Will my hon. Friend add to his list the fact that we are the only country in Europe which seems to insist on requiring immigration and customs facilities to be carried out at the terminus? It is possible to travel into and out of the Community—to and from Switzerland and Germany—with all the documentation sorted out on the train. We still do not have such a facility on offer.

Mr. Dykes: The myopic people pursuing the policy for facilities at the terminus will find that the public will not accept it. There will be rioting on a grand scale if they

pursue it. I do not suggest that politicians should be involved in the rioting, but the public will not accept such a policy over the next few decades when there is agreement between the other European countries to cross frontiers without any checks. Interpol does not consider that a threat to the prevention of terrorism and drug trafficking.

It must be the message from this new Cabinet, devoted as it is to the development and expansion of BR, that it will keep up with the rest of Europe, and perhaps in a few years' time we can have an all-electric network for long-distance and short-distance routes including regional trains, and which will be a system in which we can, as we did in the past, take pride.

8.37 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I recognise the relief that the hon. Members for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) must feel at the Government's change of heart as the Tory party is officially no longer against the railways. However, there was not much evidence in the speech by the Secretary of State for Transport of a change of heart. There has been a major shift of power in the House this year and increasingly Conservative Members question what the Labour party will be doing in government over the next five years instead of thinking about what they will be doing in opposition.

The Secretary of State's performance was remarkable. He moved the Bill's Second Reading, but spent only one or two minutes considering it. After that, he made what amounted to an Opposition shadow spokesman's speech when he attacked Labour's policy. The ministerial speech was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). He clearly set out authoritatively a policy for rail—over which some of us might raise a few question marks—which the next Labour Government would carry forward. There seems to have been an interesting movement of power in the House over the past few months.

It is a great tragedy that, throughout the 1980s, the Government were against BR and against providing resources for it. During the 1980s, Britain derived a tremendous amount of wealth from the North sea and we should have invested it in major infrastructure and, in particular, in British Rail. It is a tragedy that that opportunity was missed. Although I welcome the Government's conversion, I must point out that it will cost a lot more now to do what should have been done 10 years ago.

I should like to raise some specific constituency points. First, I wish to make a bitter complaint against British Rail which has failed to reach a decision about a freight terminal for Greater Manchester. Tameside local authority suggested a joint venture project for a terminal at Guide Bridge. The original proposals were advanced almost three years ago and British Rail assured the local authority that there would be a decision by January this year. No decision has yet been reached.

I very much regret that the chairman of British Rail has continually fobbed off my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who has been writing to him to press the case for the terminal on behalf of the three Tameside Members. We want an urgent decision—first, because if we are not to have a freight terminal, the land could be used for something else. Secondly, we want a successful terminal, but if it is to be successful, we must persuade a large number of manufacturers in the Greater Manchester area that if they are to export to Europe in the future, they must have containers that are capable of a short road trip into the terminal, followed by a long rail trip. If those companies are to make plans and to take their freight off the road network on to the rail network, they should be making their decisions now.

At Question Time on Monday, the Minister told me that he hoped that British Rail would make a decision before he visited the north-west. However, when I intervened earlier, he said that he hoped that British Rail would make its decision this summer but summer is an ambiguous word. I plead with British Rail to reach a favourable decision quickly. We need such a decision so that we can carry out the policy of both the Government and the Labour party and transfer a large volume of freight from road to rail.

My second point relates to the developments at Stockport station. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) was ever in the signal box at Stockport, but he must be aware that there used to be a large coal yard at the side of the station. During the 1970s and 1980s, the people of Stockport were promised that, when that coal yard ceased to be used for that purpose, the area would provide a new facility, a bus-rail interchange for Stockport. The people of Stockport have seen the way in which imaginative bus-rail interchange facilities have been developed in Bury and Altrincham. We were told that Stockport would have a small bus provision, with the main bus station being sited in the bottom of the valley.

The development is now being completed, but there is only minimal provision for buses. It is almost impossible for buses to enter the station area. There is also minimal provision for taxis. Most of the land has been used for a leisure development and for a McDonald's drive-in food takeaway. That sort of commercial development is the last thing that that land should be used for. Of course, many of the kids in my constituency like the idea of going to a McDonald's and I have no objection to that, but it is a tragedy that, instead of allowing Stockport to have a good bus-rail interchange that would facilitate good public transport in the area, that land has been used for a drive-in McDonald's takeaway.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that that represents a change of policy? Whatever the criticisms of the 1974-79 Labour Government, they impressed upon British Rail the need to offer local authorities any of its surplus land that they could use. However, British Rail is now under pressure to maximise revenue from the sale of land to finance the railway service. That is why important schemes, such as the one in Stockport that my hon. Friend has mentioned, are coming to naught.

Mr. Bennett: I fully accept my hon. Friend's point. I had been about to say that British Rail has been pushed into short-term profit instead of being allowed to provide a good integrated transport service.

My third point relates to the way in which British Rail is cheating Parliament in terms of the service that it provides on the Stockport to Manchester, Victoria line. That line runs through my constituency, from Stockport to Reddish, South into Denton, on to Ashton and then down

[Mr. Bennett]

to Manchester, Victoria. In 1966, British Rail outlined proposals to the Transport Users Consultative Committee for the closure of the line, but the case was decided against British Rail. I accept that, since then, the number of people living close to the stations on that line has declined and that Reddish, South and Denton are no longer viable stations. If that line is to be successful, a series of new stations should be built much closer to where people now live.

I would not have complained too much if British Rail had proposed the closure of those stations—that would have been sad, but I could have understood it—but instead of opting for closure, British Rail claims that it is still providing a service on that line. Last year, the service on that line consisted of one train per week on a Monday morning. I was not surprised to learn that, on at least two occasions, the Monday morning train was cancelled. I am told that, on other Monday mornings, the train was absolutely empty. Running a train just once a week is not much of a service. Instead of running a train on a Monday morning, this year British Rail has run it on a Friday morning—no doubt to improve the service. Again, I am told that virtually nobody travels on the train.

It is nonsense for British Rail to claim that it is providing a service between Stockport and Manchester, Victoria to meet its statutory requirements when it runs only one train per week. British Rail should be honest with Parliament and say that it is seeking to withdraw that passenger service. Indeed, it should go ahead and withdraw it because that is what it is effectively doing with that nonsense of one train a week. That is typical of British Rail's lack of interest in the Greater Manchester network. Unless it can get a subsidy from the local authority, British Rail is clearly not prepared to provide a service.

The Minister has proudly said from the Dispatch Box that the Government have increased the number of railway lines. The line from Stockport to Manchester, Victoria will be included in that increase, but how can a service that comprises only one train a week count, especially when it is sometimes cancelled?

Mr. Prescott: Is the service paid for by the local authority?

Mr. Bennett: No, not in this case. The service has no subsidy.

My next point relates to the Brinnington service. Again, we have heard a fanfare from British Rail that that station, for which the Government claim credit although it was provided by the local authority, is to benefit from an improved half-hourly service. I very much welcome that. However, many of my constituents, who travel from Brinnington to Reddish on that line, have found that, instead of there being an improved service at Reddish, alternate trains do not stop there. That means that there is a half-hourly service from Brinnington to Manchester via Reddish, but that Reddish has only an hourly service. I understand that it would take an extra two minutes for the train to stop at Reddish, but British Rail apparently feels that that two-minute delay is not worthwhile. The result is that my constituents who want to travel from Brinnington to Reddish cannot do so.

Many people in Reddish think that, because there is only an hourly service, they might as well forget about using British Rail. The result is more cars going into Manchester, where the parking problems are increasing. If there is only an hourly service, those who are going shopping have to fit in their errands extremely well so that they can be back in time for a train. One can be more flexible with a service that runs every half hour or every 20 minutes because, if one misses one train, one will not have to wait long for another. I plead with British Rail to reconsider the case of Reddish and to provide a good service.

The general level of British Rail's local services in the Greater Manchester area is simply not good enough. There are repeated delays and cancellations and the service is generally unreliable. The result is the people find alternative ways of travelling.

My next point is a personal plea on behalf of Members of Parliament. Ever since I came to the House in 1974, there has been a sleeper service from London to Manchester. British Rail has threatened to withdraw it on several occasions and we have used various devices to try to stop it doing so. We have objected to private Bills and lobbied British Rail hard. Two years ago, it came up with a proposal to run sleepers one way and to send them back empty the other way.

Now we hear rumours from the sleeping car attendants that, from October, the sleeper service to Manchester will be withdrawn. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), on behalf of the north-west group of Labour Members of Parliament, has written to British Rail and a meeting has been set up for the 23rd of this month. But we still cannot get firm information from British Rail about the sleeper service to Manchester. It would be a tragedy if that service were withdrawn—not only because many Members of Parliament use it on a Thursday night to return to their constituencies, but because it is a well-used service.

It is interesting to note the way in which over the years British Rail has slowly eroded the service. In 1974 when I first used the service passengers could stay on the train when it reached London or Manchester until 8 am. In order to save a little money in pay to the sleeping car attendants British Rail cut that and passengers had to be off the train at 7.30 am at both ends. Then that was cut back to 7 am. If someone is going up to Manchester for a day's work, it is not very attractive to have to get off the train at 7 am and find something to do in Manchester for one and a half hours before going to a meeting. British Rail made a small saving but cut the service. It has eroded the service in other small ways.

I simply make a plea that the service should be retained for the benefit not only of Members of Parliament but of many other people who find it convenient. The more that British Rail cuts such services, the more that people who have to go to Manchester will think, "Why not fly up?" If one has a meeting in Manchester at 9 am, one must either fly up or take the sleeper. If one flies up, one might as well fly back.

We have been told that British Rail intends to consider providing sleeper services from the north of England to Europe. If it is considering such a service it seems odd that it cannot maintain a sleeper service from Manchester to London. I make a plea to it to ensure that the sleeper service is continued for the short term. Perhaps, in the longer term, British Rail could consider integrating the sleeper service from Manchester to London with a sleeper service on from London to Europe.

We are debating investment in British Rail. If the nation wants good passenger services it must put the money in. I welcome the Government's conversion in principle to rail, but I argue strongly that they must match that conversion by putting up the money. We need investment, not the stale arguments of the Secretary of State about privatising British Rail. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East firmly developed the argument that we would not have alternative railway lines competing with each other as we had last century. The most that we could have would be private firms providing a service on those railway lines. I make a plea for the level of investment in British Rail in the next 10 years which we should have had in the past 10 years.

8.53 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that the Bill is welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish referred to the implications of the Bill for the north-west of England. I shall restrict my remarks to how the Bill will affect the Principality of Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) has already made some interesting references to Wales. Like him, I am a valleys Member of Parliament. Perhaps I should say "velleys", but the public address system at Newport station is not quite as yuppified as it is in the capital city of Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made a statesmanlike speech. He made some important points about the need for a consensus about the development of policy on the railways. In the past few years there have been some important developments in railways in Wales which I and many of my colleagues in Wales welcome. For example, there are more trains and they are more frequent and more modern. The 1960s stock has gradually been replaced despite some severe teething problems with the new sprinters.

Some new lines, have opened around the Cardiff, area and in the Aberdare valley, while other lines, such as the one from Maesteg to Cardiff have been planned. Despite some problems, the 125 inter-city train from London to Cardiff, and vice versa, is still in general a good service. Some new signalling has been put in and a new pumping station has been built at the Severn tunnel. There have also been several improvements to some stations in both north and south Wales at Holyhead, Queen Street station in Cardiff and Caerphilly.

I must confess that I thought that the Secretary of State's speech was singularly partisan. His points about privatisation did not hit the right note, certainly for Wales. Many of us in the Principality believe that breaking up British Rail into sectors was fattening the calf for privatisation. The effect of that has been many of our services in Wales which are, indeed, under the control of the so-called provincial sector of British Rail have been put in serious jeopardy.

One source in Wales was recently quoted as saying:

"Trains are available but no staff; staff are available but no trains; and in many areas, neither staff nor trains."

Trains are delayed and staff are not used to the best advantage. Several inter-city trains have been rerouted via Bristol Parkway to avoid paying the cost to the provincial sector of going through Lydney to south Wales.

Splitting up British rail into sectors has been nothing but bad news for the Principality. Several of our rail systems, especially in south Wales, have been adversely affected by sectorisation. For example, there are no railway lines in the valley of Gwent. Almost a quarter of a million people reside in those valleys. At the top of the western valley is the town of Ebbw Vale, which next year will be the site of the national garden festival. A line which is used by freight could go from Newport up the valley to Ebbw Vale. Yet the line is not being utilised, despite the obvious need for extra passenger services at the time of the garden festival.

There is no railway line in my valley—the eastern valley of Gwent. There is no proper line in the Vale of Glamorgan, which is becoming the commuter area for the capital city of Wales. There is no link to Wales's airport, the Cardiff-Wales airport close to the capital city. There is a railway line within spitting distance of the airport, but no proper link between the airport and the city.

Some valley services are inadequate. In my constituency, Pontypool station, formerly one of Wales' great junctions, has had its service severely cut in the past few weeks for wholly unacceptable reasons—despite the claim by British Rail that there are

"improved service patterns, especially in the valleys"—

certainly not in my area, but I hope that there will be improvements.

There is still a great need for better signalling, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd said. Some trains are overcrowded, and there are not enough of them. There are poor luggage facilities at some stations, which suffer from a lack of staffing—even complete destaffing—and the policy of open stations has led to loss of revenue, to poor information and to tragic cases of vandalism and violence.

Wales needs a better north-south link, new lines, improved stations and more facilities for disabled people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) said. Waiting accommodation needs improvement, and new stations should be built between Port Talbot and Llanelli and at Magor and Portskewett.

Some of our stations are nothing more than what we in our youth used to call railway halts. Amazingly, when a new halt is built nowadays, it attracts the same sort of enthusiasm as the great stations built by our Victorian grandfathers did in the past century. I sometimes wonder what would happen if those who built the great embankments, cutings, viaducts and railway lines came back and saw what had happened to them—they would be scandalised.

The hon. Members for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), in their engaging speeches, referred to the new European dimension, which represents the challenge of the next few years for Wales. We are on the periphery and we need new Euro-terminals with customs clearance for rail freight at Newport, Cardiff, Swansea and Holyhead. We need to re-examine the idea —even though British Rail has dismissed it—of electrifying the main line from Holyhead through north Wales to Crewe and down to London. That is a main European rail route, not only for Wales and the United Kingdom but for the Republic of Ireland.

It is scandalous that Wales will not have a daytime through service from the main centres of south Wales direct to Paris and Brussels when the channel tunnel opens. British Rail and the Government should reconsider that.

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

Wales should have its fair share of any extra funding that the Bill may provide. One of the greatest villains in modern Welsh history was Lord Beeching, who closed down many lines. Over the past 20 or 30 years we have found to our cost that those lines could have been used for railways, roads and other useful purposes.

We are heading into a new era and another century. I hope that all Governments, whether Conservative or the new Labour Government, will use the opportunity to introduce a modern, integrated transport system to the Principality in which rail will play a major and vital role.

9.2 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am a great railway enthusiast and the founder of the Keighley and Worth Valley railway preservation society, which successfully took over a five-mile branch line and undertook the maintenance of engines, rolling stock, track, bridges, tunnels and fencing. So in a small way I have helped to preserve five miles of railway that would otherwise have been turned into a linear tip, just like many other miles of railway. So I have experience of and a background in railway work.

It was wonderful that so many rail workers took part in developing the railway in their spare time. Many rail workers—they are often much maligned—are devoted enthusiasts in the cause of providing the highest standards of railway service. Unfortunately, because of Government-imposed financial limitations, they are often inhibited in that task. Many British Rail managers have the same attitude, but some are critically regarded by the workers who meet the public and run the trains for seeming less in touch than they should be with the needs of the railway.

Conservative Members talk glibly of privatisation, which has never happened to the railways since they began. In 1829, when the Manchester to Liverpool Rainhill trials were held and the Rocket proved such a far-sighted and advanced design, there were moves to allow every railway operator access to the tracks. However, it was realised that that was not possible on safety grounds. There developed more than 100 private railway operators, which means a highly inefficient and badly organised system, although the railways owned clearing houses to move privately owned wagons from one network to another. It was cumbersome and bureaucratic, so the Conservative Government passed a compulsory amalgamation Act to create the London and North Eastern railway, the London Midland Scottish, the Southern railway and the Great Western railway.

On that basis, in the post-war period, the railway system was brought into public ownership. That was much needed, because it has been run down greatly, not as a result of a particularly wayward attitude by the railway owners but because of the enormous tasks that they had undertaken during the war. In the post-war period, there was not the necessary private capital to refurbish railways, and a public effort was needed.

Mr. Gregory: I have been following the hon. Gentleman with considerable interest. The crucial point that he is making about denationalisation is an historic one. However, in modern transport terms, the analogy should be with the airlines. It would be possible to denationalise the railways by having something like the Civil Aviation Authority in control of the track and signalling, and then having private operators to move freight and passengers, just as we have with maximum safety and security with the Orient Express and InterCity.

Mr. Cryer: All sorts of consequences would arise from such a system. Routes would be selected so that favoured customers and friends of the Conservative Government would receive the creamed-off profitable routes. The rural routes would have constantly to struggle for public subsidy, even if companies came forward to take them over.

The only motivation in the system outlined by the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) is profit. Some railway lines will never make a profit, but they provide valuable public services. How will that be calculated? There will be a continual battle, and energy will be wasted when we should be retaining a public service of the highest standard. We should not be arguing over which company has the best routes so as to make the most profit. The argument should be about how to provide the best standard of public service, because that would improve the morale of the workers, managers and the users.

I shall elaborate briefly on the purpose of the publicly owned network. In a privatised concern, who would take over the hundreds of disused railway viaducts, which are part of British Rail's maintenance problem? They are all listed structures and cannot simply be bulldozed out of existence. Often, it would be difficult to bulldoze them anyway, because they straddle reservoirs, so building rubble cannot be allowed to drop on the land because of the catchment areas. British Rail also has hundreds of listed buildings that are stations, which it has to maintain although the funds to do so are in short supply.

It is not true that British Rail has no additional obligations over and above the general one of running a service. That is not to say that British Rail is not trying to dispose of these burdens to local authorities or trusts so that people who are devoted to the preservation of these important structures can concentrate on that. Where it is reasonable so to do, British Rail can discard those obligations and get on with its primary task of providing a decent public service.

Having given that brief background, I wish to focus the attention of the House and, especially, the Minister on the proposal for electrification of the Bradford line. The Bradford chamber of commerce—which I suppose, although I do not know, contains a majority of Conservative rather than Labour supporters—strongly supports the electrification scheme, as does the Labour-controlled Bradford council. The scheme would cover the Leeds, Shipley, Bradford, Foster Square route, the Leeds, Bradford, Shipley, Keighley, Skipton route—the Airedale service—and the Leeds, Bradford, Ilkley route—the Wharfedale service. It would enable a fast, reliable local service to operate on all three routes. Most important, it would allow the InterCity electric services to run on to Bradford from London. In the longer term, it would allow channel tunnel trains to operate from Bradford.

As the Minister knows, Bradford is the primary city of Yorkshire. It is the queen of Yorkshire cities, but it has been pushed down the scale of railway services during the past 10 to 15 years. For example, it no longer has a freight depot of any significance. The Post Office has to use lorries to carry parcels to either Preston or Leeds because loading

facilities at the Bradford interchange are not adequate. It is absurd that parcels should be transported by road when there is a railway facility in Bradford which, with a small amount of investment, could accommodate the significant parcels traffic in Bradford—which is the home for a large number of mail order companies. We want money to be invested in that sort of project so that lorry traffic can be kept at as low a level as possible.

Under a £400 million electrification scheme, InterCity trains run from London to Leeds, but they then have to be hauled to Bradford by a diesel electric locomotive. That is uneconomic and inefficient. It slows down the trains and hinders the development of a good, fast, electric service from Bradford to London. That is why electrification is so important.

I shall explain the background to the proposal. In April 1990, the Government said that no decision was possible on the scheme until the public expenditure negotiations were completed in November 1990. British Rail negotiated an option on the trains with fixed terms of purchase until May this year. Last November, the Government gave credit approvals for the infrastructure—the overhead catenary—and lineside structures, but not the trains. The passenger transport authority advised the government that it would use operating leases to acquire the trains because the rental payments would not count as capital expenditure. In May, the Minister wrote to the PTA saying that operating leases may be reclassified by the Government as capital expenditure, with retrospective effect. That ruled out that form of finance.

Councillor Mick Lyons wrote to the Minister on 22 May saying:

"It is fair to say that we have pursued the acquisition of the trains by means of an operating lease not as a first preference (although competitive terms are available) but because the credit approvals you gave for the scheme last November never made any allowance for the trains. Operating leases were therefore the only form of finance in which resources could be made available. You have now advised me that it would be imprudent to rely on this form of finance because of possible changes by the Government to the regulations affecting borrowing."

That means that the delay is entirely the Government's responsibility. Since the Government have ruled out other forms of finance, they must, as a matter of urgency, give credit approvals for trains.

One important aspect that I must mention is that the passenger transport authority is still exploring with the manufacturers whether an order can be delayed until November and whether there will be a cost in doing that. If there is a cost, will the Government meet it, because it will be due to their delay? The concomitant of that is that trains will be built in Leeds by Hunslet. If there is not a continuous programme of carriage construction, that will inevitably lead to redundancies from a team of skilled workers who have the production organised to maintain high standards of output and productivity, which is what I am sure we all want.

I want briefly to mention two other points about credit approvals. When passenger transport authorities borrow to finance investment, they have to pass on the cost of servicing the debt which falls on the revenue account to the district councils as part of the annual levy. Usually the Government allow for that in setting the district councils' standard spending assessments, because the credit approvals given to the passenger transport authority are included in the SSA for servicing debt for each district.

However, one of the problems is that the Government are treating only part of the expenditure as trading and the other part as capital expenditure. In the view of the passenger transport authority, the reality is that the services lose money. They will continue to do so after the investment, but the electrification will reduce the deficit. The services are among the most heavily used in West Yorkshire, and the Government accept that closure is completely out of the question. Electrification shows an 8 per cent. return compared with the base case, but the surplus which it earns is needed to reduce the operating deficit. It is not a profit that can be used to service the debt, so that service will fall on the district councils.

I think, and the passenger transport authority has made representations along these lines to me, that the Government should agree to give credit approvals to cover the full capital cost of the scheme and classify the credit approvals as non-trading. Otherwise, if district councils are required to pay for the cost of electrification—this is a great danger, as the Minister knows—they will face capping and cuts in their services. If that happened, the district councils would naturally be presented with an invidious set of priorities and might feel bound to refuse to pay their contribution.

British Rail has to make a contribution to the cost of the electrification scheme. That is under negotiation, but does the Bill enable British Rail to make its contribution to the electrification scheme? There has been some suggestion of a moratorium imposed by the Treasury on British Rail's investment plans. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) pointed out, the Bill is to stop British Rail drifting to a point of virtual bankruptcy. Public corporations do not go into bankruptcy, but that would be its technical position. Therefore, this will be extra investment. Does the Bill allow for investment by British Rail in the Bradford electrification scheme, so that its proportion of the scheme can be retained and maintained? If it does not, the scheme could well be in jeopardy.

There is a great deal of good will in Bradford, Leeds and the surrounding area towards the electrification scheme. The Minister also has good will towards the scheme, but he must realise that the Government will look extremely foolish if they give consent only for the overhead wiring, but not for the stock to run under it.

I will tell the Minister what it is like to travel from Leeds to Bradford at peak times on the existing diesel multiple unit services. The trains are so crowded that people have to press together to allow the doors to be closed. Once the doors are closed, passengers can step down into the well and breathe a little more easily. It is not possible to move along the gangways of the coaches because they are absolutely packed. Trains start out from Leeds in that way, and passengers get off and on at the stations up the Aire valley line and from Leeds to the Bradford interchange. Those passengers should know that the overcrowding is caused by the Government's failure to give the electrification scheme authorisation.

With electrification, a more rapid service would be provided. Electric traction has a greater acceleration than diesel multiple units. There would be a cleaner and more comfortable service, and the diesel multiple units already in operation could be cascaded down on to services that are not electrified in the West Yorkshire region, which would provide a better standard of service there. All the railways in the area would have a better standard of service

[Mr. Cryer]

and would generate extra passenger use and revenue. The Minister must recognise how important it is for him to battle with the Treasury, or with anyone else who is to hand and who is blocking the authorisation, so that the electrification scheme can go ahead. That will ensure that West Yorkshire has the train service that its people need and deserve.

9.21 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): This has been an interesting debate, which started off in a somewhat surprising way. As my hon. Friends have said, the Secretary of State spent the first five or six minutes of his speech in outlining the basic thinking behind the Bill—the need to increase the borrowing powers of British Rail—and then spent an extra 35 minutes cross-examining my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) about the Labour party's policy and what we will do when we come into government. That is rather a role reversal. I hope that the Minister will tell us something about the Government's plans in the last few remaining months in which he occupies his post and in which the Government remain in power.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East set out in some detail the Labour party's policies and philosophy towards the railway industry. He surprised and pleased a few hon. Members, both Conservative and Labour, by the radical nature of those policies, although I appreciate that for certain Conservative Members yesterday's ideological battle is all important whereas the reality of running a railway in the 1990s and planning railway policy does not matter very much.

In some ways, it is surprising that the Bill has been so long in coming. Although I may have a few harsh words to say about certain British Rail managers and certain policies, I should pay some tribute to their financial acumen. They have kept things going, albeit on a shoestring, for many years. British Rail has survived since 1982 on the Transport (Finance) Act 1982. It has survived, if not prospered, at a time when inflation has increased costs by 75 per cent. through an ingenious system of increasing efficiency, a dramatic increase in real terms in fares, a reduction in manpower and, at least during the short-lived boom years, the sale of property assets.

In many respects, the Bill represents a watershed—a central and inherent failure in Government policy. What price privatisation now? According to the Secretary of State's figures and some of the statements made by BR's newish chairman, BR needs investment of more than £1 billion per annum: in the chairman's opinion, it will need £2 billion per annum over the next few years. I shall not argue about the odd billion, because I do not wish to disturb the tranquillity with which the debate has largely been conducted.

Mr. Gregory: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: No, no, I have not even started yet. I shall, however, be dealing in some detail with the hon. Gentleman's remarks later. They elevated parliamentary buffoonery to a fine art, and I want to refute all the factual errors that he made—although I fear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I may detain the House for far too long if I do so. I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's contribution—if I may dignify it with that description—in a moment.

The Government still claim that the privatisation of the railways is, like the poll tax, a flagship of their policy. No doubt it will go the same way as that earlier flagship, but no matter. According to the figures that we have been given, the industry needs some £600 million of support per annum. Indeed, InterCity is the only sector that is in profit, and it is in profit only because of the financial regulations that force it to charge the highest passenger rail fares in western Europe.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East pointed out, the fact that InterCity's receipts have held up so well in recent years can be credited partly to the quality of the service that is sometimes provided—although it is not provided often enough for me—but also to the disadvantages of road travel, which, to say the least, is also a frustrating and congestion-ridden business.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us—if he cannot, perhaps the Secretary of State will whisper in his ear—how this great flagship, privatisation, will set sail, given the stormy financial seas that I have just described. I want to ask the Minister one or two more specific questions. In the eight years for which I have been doing this job, I have listened to and participated in many railway debates. As well as witnessing the yah-boo politics typified by the Secretary of State's speech today, I have heard from successive Secretaries of State—and, my goodness, they have come and gone like subalterns on the western front—about all the great improvements that the Government have made.

Normally, when Opposition Members ask what has happened to a particular investment proposal or improvement scheme, the parrot cry comes back, "No such proposal is on my desk. I clear my desk regularly, and investment proposals are on and off it in a matter of days." We all know how true that is, because, after 12 years of Conservative government, we know how the game is played.

Mr. Gregory *rose*——

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. I shall be round to give him a verbal box on the ears in no time at all.

Mr. Gregory *rose*——

Mr. Snape: No, I will not give way, and I will tell the hon. Gentleman why. He made a speech that was riddled with factual errors, with which I shall deal in a moment; he then walked out, and was subsequently seen skulking in the Tea Room, having not even waited for the speech that followed his to finish.

Mr. Gregory: No.

Mr. Snape: That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman did: I watched him. Then, about 11 minutes ago, he returned to the Chamber, and immediately intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). The hon. Gentleman may think that we are all desperately hanging on his every word. I know that he will not be here much longer, but I must tell him that such is not the case. I shall give the hon. Gentleman a chance in a few moments. I must not be sidetracked, in railway parlance, by the hon. Gentleman's infrequent appearances in the Chamber.

Can the Minister for Public Transport provide details of the investment submissions that are in the pipeline, whether or not they are on his desk? Would approval for the Bill lead to the go-ahead for the inter-city 250 scheme for the west coast main line? Those of us who regularly use the train service between Birmingham and Euston are aware of its deficiencies. Like other hon. Members on both sides of the House I, too, have suffered during the last two weeks. The Monday before last, I missed Transport questions owing to a derailment the previous day and a signal failure—the usual hurdles one has to jump, again to mix metaphors, on passenger journeys from Birmingham. Having been diverted via Coventry and Nuneaton and arriving at Euston an hour and a half after I expected, I was unable to hear the customary soothing words of wisdom of the Secretary of State and the Minister for Public Transport.

I should appreciate it if the Minister could tell me whether approval for the Bill will lead to progress towards electrification of the line and modernisation of the signalling system that dates back to the 1960s. Can he tell us about the Heathrow express link, the Civil Aviation Authority report notwithstanding, and whether there is to be progress on that in the near future? Can he also tell us about the Manchester airport link, approval for which was given in the House, largely thanks to the campaign fought by my hon. Friends with constituencies in the north-west of England, two years ago? No doubt we shall be told that the proposal is not yet on the Minister's desk. If it is not on his desk, it is under some civil servant's desk. Perhaps the Minister will reach under that civil servant's desk, extract the proposal and tell us about the likely fate of the project.

Other projects are in the pipeline. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred to Ashford international station, which I understand is to be included in the British Railways (No. 3) Bill which the House is to debate next Tuesday. Can the Minister say when building is likely to commence, once parliamentary approval has been granted? Apart from King's Cross and the Kent coast Networker, my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South talked about the Aire valley electrification scheme. Finally, there is crossrail.

The public service obligation limit of £3 billion will last only for five years at the current rate of expenditure. Does the Secretary of State expect to increase it, or is the Government's original intention to phase it out to be adhered to during that five-year period? If so, can the Government provide us with some facts? My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East provided us with many facts and policies that will be adopted by the Labour party.

If the Government intend to phase out the PSO, they ought to have the courage to say so. They ought to say to the, regrettably, largely Conservative-voting populace who use the various former southern region stations—now part of Network SouthEast—that that commitment will mean, according to our estimate, a 45 per cent. increase, in real terms, in rail fares if Network SouthEast is to break even.

I hope that the Minister will come clean and tell us whether that is still the Government's intention. Will he and his Conservative party colleagues be honest enough to say that on the doorsteps of Network SouthEast voters during the forthcoming election campaign? I shall let him into a secret. If they are not prepared to do that, we are. If that is the Government's policy, the Minister should say so tonight. If it is not, it will mean that there has been a U-turn. That would enable the Opposition to comment upon it. Then we should know exactly where the Government stand.

What is the Minister's and the Department's position regarding the chairman of British Rail's reasonable request for an additional £340 million external financing limit for this year? Will the Department make that sum available? The chairman of British Rail made that request to the Select Committee on Transport only last week. All of us are familiar with the refrain that some British Rail managers have used over and over again during the last few years: that they have enough investment money to be going on with and that they cannot cope with any more. Obviously the chairman of British Rail feels that he could cope, because he requested that extra £340 million only last week.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East talked about British Rail's borrowing powers and about a future Labour Government's anxiety to involve private sector capital in some of the projects, as is done in other EEC countries. If our figures are correct, British Rail's asset base is about £12 billion. I wonder whether the Minister agrees that borrowing powers of about £3 billion are relatively modest in relation to that sum and it would not by any stretch of the imagination break the bank if British Rail was allowed greater borrowing powers.

The Secretary of State talked about the value of competition. I am always interested when the Conservative party talks about competition. It is a doctrine that it espouses frequently but practises rarely. Conservative Members make great play of the effects of their privatisation proposals. However, those proposals have rarely brought about any additional competition. In fact, the reverse is often the case.

As many people have commented, the public monopolies have been replaced by private ones. The Secretary of State mentioned the London-Birmingham route. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) is a great fan of the former Great Western railway. No doubt his eyes clouded over at the thought of kings, halls and castles making their way along the former Great Western line.

However, that competition led to great financial problems for the former railway companies. It is what Mr. Alfred Barnes, the first Labour Minister of Transport, described as the

"pretty poor bag of assets"

that the nation inherited after nationalisation in 1948. That sort of ruinous and outdated competition brought the railway companies to such a sorry state.

I do not believe—and I am sure that the Secretary of State does not believe—that the restoration of kings, halls and castles is the way forward for British Rail's inter-city services in the 1990s. Perhaps the minister will clarify what the Government mean by competition now.

I have put to the Minister some specific questions about investment in new rolling stock. I hope that he will answer them and once again announce the Government's new found conversion to the principle of transferring freight from road to rail. The Minister could do one or two things to bring that pious hope towards reality. As long ago as 1977, the Leitch committee recommended that investment criteria for road and rail should be judged on the same basis. Fourteen years later, we still have the cost-benefit

[Mr. Snape]

analysis system for road building that I am not sure anybody understands, including successive permanent secretaries at the Department of Transport. Any railway project must be justified on the ground of an 8 per cent. return on the capital investment. I return to that subject in the vain hope that the Government will do something about the criteria for both modes of transport.

In many city councils the road builders, road repairers, borough surveyors and directors of technical services—to give them their proper and suitably salaried title—reign supreme. However, even there there is a growing knowledge that building more and more roads in the hope of catering for more and more cars and road transport is not the way forward and cannot continue for much longer. The city engineer in Birmingham, Mr. Derek Rawson, told me recently that he had met some regional officials from the Department of Transport to suggest that Birmingham should look at its transport requirements in various parts of the region on a corridor basis to decide how best expenditure on road, rail, park and ride, and so on could tackle the problems of congestion.

That is a progressive view from someone who, for understandable reasons, has spent most of his highly qualified working life in the road building and repair business. He told me that not only did the Department of Transport's regional office show little interest in such an approach but almost said, "It is not our business to worry about such things; our business is to decide what needs to be done to the road network and to get on with it." We have often said that the Department of Transport is a misnomer. There is no way of considering transport requirements on a corridor basis or of deciding how best to provide a transport system that will prevent a city from seizing up.

One of the reasons why Birmingham is so concerned is that the opening of the M40 has attracted much extra traffic to Birmingham, yet because of the half-baked way in which we plan—or do not plan—such matters, when traffic leaves the M40 it is the city council's job to disperse or to dispose of it. There is no coherent method of planning park-and-ride stations, so that after leaving the M40, motorists can leave their cars at the first convenient point and take public transport into the city. It is British Rail's responsibility to provide and to fund such facilities. That is exactly why we are here today.

The Secretary of State trotted out a few supposed facts and figures about new lines and stations. He should check his brief better before he reads it. I make allowances for the fact that somebody else wrote it. If he wrote it himself, he is more worthy of castigation than my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East suggested—no *Observer* mace for him. Although his delivery was excellent, I cannot give him more than two out of 10 for content.

Mr. Gregory *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I will deal with York shortly; I am dealing with the more important speeches.

The Secretary of State made great play of the railway lines that had been opened under the Government.

Mr. Gregory: And country stations.

Mr. Snape: Country stations as well, yes.

In the 1980s, several former freight-only lines were opened or restored for passenger use. Apart from one stretch of line provided by British Coal, all the other services have been paid for by British Rail from its own resources or, more usually, by BR and local authorities. None of the lines has received any direct support from the Government. If the Secretary of State, who I notice is getting a little restless, has contrary information, he should give it to us.

The Secretary of State said that about 163 stations had opened or reopened since the sad day when the Government were elected. More than half have been paid for in whole or in part by passenger transport executives. Most of the other stations were paid for by county councils and a handful of British Rail. None has been opened thanks to any direct Government help, so although it is a fine debating point, and perhaps worth three out of 10 in the debating competition, it is not valid in debates on financing railway lines and stations.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) talked about the teething troubles on the east coast main line—at least, I hope that is what he talked about. It is early days, and we hope that the investment in that line will result in faster and more reliable services. He also spoke of cuts in rural services and of the dilemma that we face in trying to obtain information from the Government and that British Rail's management face in running services despite an ever-declining PSO grant. I hope that the Minister will reply to that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) spoke of bus substitution and early and late services. Regional railways must save money on the periphery of their operations simply because it is so tight. I hope that the Minister of State will tell us whether the passing of this financial measure will ease that burden.

The hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) understandably talked about the channel tunnel and the high-speed link. I hope that he will not feel that I am being unduly cynical if, while congratulating him on the assiduous way in which he represents his constituents' interests, I say that, if everyone behaved as he did, there would never be a tunnel rail link. The general view appears to be that such a link is necessary but not in one's own constituency.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Although I and my constituents do not think that the link should run through south-east London because that is the wrong route, other districts are saying, "Please come through our constituency," because they can benefit from it. This is not a NIMBY syndrome but a PIMBY syndrome—please come through my backyard.

Mr. Snape: Transport planning cannot be decided properly on the basis of which hon. Member wishes the rail link to pass through his constituency, although I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's case that the link should not pass through his part of London. The sooner there is a statement and the sooner we are put out of our misery the better, so I hope that the Minister of State will give us some idea of when a statement will be made.

I deal now with the contribution of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory), who I know is anxious to intervene again to give us the benefit of his great knowledge, which was no doubt acquired while playing

trains with his nanny in the nursery many years ago. The facts and figures that he trotted out were united by one factor—they were all wrong.

He talked first about the progress that Amtrak had made when compared to British Rail. The hon. Member for Christchurch put him in his place rather cruelly, although what he said was true. If Amtrak demonstrates the financial prowess of the private sector railroad system in the United States, the hon. Member for York is turning reality on its head. If the hon. Gentleman could tell me between which two American cities Amtrak provides a service that is even remotely comparable to that between York and King's Cross, I should be surprised.

Mr. Gregory *rose*—

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman then spoke about British Rail's disability panel and said that there was no blind person on the panel. That is wrong: there is at least one blind member. He went on to speak about punctuality and stated that inter-city trains that arrive within 20 minutes of the book time are regarded as being on time. That is also wrong, because the time allowed is 10 minutes—it used to be five minutes, but it is now 10.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned compensation and the citizens charter, and said that the Prime Minister was the first person to think of such a charter. However, we strongly suspect that he had not thought of a citizens charter until he read about it in a Labour party policy document. The hon. Gentleman was wrong about money. He said that all inter-city trains must have two men in the cab, which is true only for trains travelling at, I think, more than 100 or 110 mph. It was largely at the insistence of the railway inspectorate that there must be two qualified drivers in the cab, because it is said that that is a safer way to proceed.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman talked about the need for more commercialism at railway stations. He is such a philistine that I can hardly wait for Mr. Hugh Bayley to be elected as the Member of Parliament for York, and I have a feeling that that will not be too long. York station is one of the few to have survived the architectural nonsense of the 1960s and 1970s. The original building is largely intact, and the fact that the hon. Member for York wants to fill it with shops selling ties, knickers and hot dogs to the detriment of those of us who wish merely to buy a ticket and catch a train—these days, we are usually the last people to be considered at railway stations—merely illustrates the depth of the intellectual buffoonery in which the hon. Gentleman indulges.

Mr. Gregory: I shall be as brief as I can, and I shall not descend to personal abuse. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) will shortly be returning to the signal box which he left to come here.

I shall answer his questions as quickly as I can. He asked for an example of a good service provided by Amtrak, and I commend to him the journey between Boston and New York, which would honour any two inter-city stations. I am afraid that, on the matter of punctuality, the hon. Gentleman cannot have been following parliamentary questions very carefully. I refer him to the parliamentary answers given on 20 March 1991 and 8 December 1988, which refer to 10 minutes on either side. That comes to a total of 20 minutes, which is on time.

The hon. Gentleman referred to commercialisation. We are debating the Second Reading of an important Bill dealing with the further funding and financing of British Rail. I trust and hope that a happy partnership between the private and public sectors will be in the best interests of York aned other cities. Finally, I hope that I shall continue to represent the great city of York for many years to come—long after the hon. Gentleman has retired from the House.

Mr. Snape: I was fascinated by that intervention. Two 10s do make 20; it is perfectly true. But if I am to return to my signal box, I must say that, with clock-watching like that, I am certainly not having the hon. Member for York as my signal box lad. I fear that the train register book would be conspicuous by its inaccuracy if I passed the hon. Gentleman a biro and let him anywhere near it.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend gave a comprehensive account of the faults of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory). Does he recall that the hon. Gentleman referred to the sole cafeteria on York station? That does not suggest a close or intimate knowledge of York station. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman goes more frequently by road when he makes his somewhat tardy journeys. There are two cafeterias on York station, both of which provide a decent service to those who trouble to go to the station in the first place.

Mr. Snape: It would seem that the hon. Gentleman's arithmetic regarding the number of cafeterias is at least as good as his clock-watching capability.

Mr. Prescott: Perhaps it is in two halves.

Mr. Snape: The restaurant is probably in two halves, and that makes only one in the quaint system of mathematics that the hon. Gentleman uses.

Mr. Cryer: They are six platforms apart.

Mr. Snape: They are six platforms apart, as my hon. Friend said.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) who, alas, is not with us, gave us a proper definition of the EC proposals, which are not about rampant privatisation, as the Secretary of State suggested earlier.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) also asked some questions about the provision of freight facilities in the north-west. We understood that an announcement was imminent in respect of Guide Bridge or any other site in the north-west. I should be grateful if the Minister could let us know exactly what the situation is with regard to channel tunnel freight facilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) gave us a comprehensive list of the railway deficiencies in Wales and, again, I hope that the Minister will bear it in mind that, welcome though it is, the Bill will go only a small way towards remedying those deficiencies. We need far more.

I hope that, given the comprehensive nature of the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East gave to the Secretary of State earlier, we shall hear from the Minister a little less of the politicking of which his right hon. and learned Friend was guilty earlier and a little more detail of exactly how the money that we are to approve tonight will be spent. It is a new departure for a least some of us to be united about the need for the proper financing, both public and private, of Britain's railway network.

[Mr. Snape]

Notwithstanding the attitude of some of the neanderthals on the Government Back Benches, there was much cross-party agreement about the necessity for the Bill. That is why Opposition Members welcome and support the Bill and hope that, in the Government's last few months in office, we shall get some more sensible and comprehensive plans for the future of our railway industry than we have had for the past decade or more.

9.53 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): Let me reassure some of my hon. Friends that I do not intend to seek to compress my reply into six minutes. Given that the 10 o'clock business motion will be moved, I am sure that the House will want me to deal properly and succinctly with the points raised. That is precisely what I intend to do. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) chided me earlier, saying that, at a recent conference, I had spent all my time trying to answer the points that had been raised—in a sense, winding up the conference. I make no apologies for that, or for seeking to answer the points that have been raised tonight. That is the purpose of a parliamentary debate.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked about investment projects. It might be for the convenience of the House if I remind hon. Members that on order at the moment for delivery within the next three years are 112 locomotives, 1,361 coaches and 700 container wagons. With regard to major infrastructure projects for completion within the next three years, there are the platform extensions and other works in preparation for the introduction of Networker trains amounting to about £100 million; the construction of the Waterloo international terminal and the North Pole maintenance depot near Willesden amounting to £200 million; new sections of track and improvements to the existing track and signalling for the Waterloo approaches which will cost about £38 million. There will also be resignalling between Paddington and West Drayton. Those are some of the investment projects that will be covered by the Bill.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): With regard to investment projects, will my hon. Friend the Minister help me and other Kent Members and explain why it is taking so long to get the Networker express project under way? I have campaigned for the project for months, yet my hon. Friend informed me in a written answer the other day that British Rail has still not even presented a formal investment proposal to the Government. We can see no reason why there should be a delay. Is there something wrong with the procedures which have caused us to become tied up in endless bureaucracy before that important project can get under way?

Mr. Freeman: The investment programme for the Kent link trains—trains from the suburbs and the towns closest to London—is likely to cost about £700 million. Most of the carriages are on order, although some vehicles remain to be approved by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. Once the ordering programme is complete, BR can, and I am sure will, consider the Kent coastal trains. It will take about two years to build the rolling stock. Even if the order was placed within the next few months, the trains would not come into service much before 1993-94.

I can confirm that the project is a high priority for British Rail. I have visited some of the stations and met some of my hon. Friends and I know how important the improvement of the service is to them. However, it is for British Rail to prioritise its investment. I hope that in reviewing its investment programme following this year's autumn statement, British Rail might be able to make more positive progress with that particular project.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked where we stood on several important projects. British Rail has made good progress in negotiations with other European railways on a consortium order of intermodal wagons for the channel tunnel. I expect an investment proposition in the autumn, when negotiations are complete. Most of the freight terminals for the channel tunnel will probably not require investment approval by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

The current cost estimate for Ashford is £150 million. British Rail is looking very carefully at whether it is possible to separate that part of the expenditure needed in anticipation of the high-speed rail link and that part which is needed simply to service trains when the channel tunnel opens. That work has not finished yet. The sum of £150 million for a terminal to allow trains simply to stop at Ashford as soon as the tunnel opens is a very expensive proposition. We could not allow BR to begin the programme without knowing whether it could finish it.

I expect an investment proposition for night trains to be put before the Department of Transport very shortly. Negotiations with GEC Alsthom continue for the seven day trains north of London that will be required. There has been no investment proposition yet from British Rail for the west coast mainline 250 service, although it is working on it. That is a programme for the mid-1990s.

British Rail pays 20 per cent. of the cost of the Heathrow express project, and I hope that construction will begin very shortly. It is intended to deposit a Bill on the crossrail in November.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East also referred to Treasury rules. As it is a most important point and I am sure that he would like there to be clarity on the subject, I have refreshed my mind about the speech that he made on the channel tunnel at the conference of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 4 July, when he said:

> "We will change the constraining Treasury rules to allow BR to raise money on the commercial markets".

The House needs to know precisely what the hon. Gentleman, the shadow Chancellor and the shadow Chief Secretary have in mind—*[Interruption]*. I am trying to answer the question that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked me about Treasury rules. He argued that at present there is constraint in the Treasury rules on borrowing——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the British Railways Board (Finance) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Freeman: I am glad to have the support of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) on the business motion.

The question whether British rail is allowed to borrow in the private market is not the central issue. It has that power today and borrows overdraft moneys from the private sector. It can borrow long term from the national loans fund because that is the cheapest form of gilt-edged borrowing. It is cheaper than borrowing in the market. I hope that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East can answer my question. If he cannot do so tonight, I shall write to him and seek his response in writing. The question is: if there was private sector borrowing of financing leases, which would be included in British Rail's balance sheet, would those be counted as public sector obligations and therefore controlled by the normal external financing limit rules?

Mr. Prescott: The Minister must be aware of the Commission's recommendations on this point. It has stated that railway companies must have a compatibility in their financial frameworks and technical competency. Like all other European railways, British Rail should be able to go to the private market for finance. The Minister is trying to change the structure of those public sector industries by adjusting the equity capital base so that he knows the true asset value. The Minister may have to make those changes, and that may involve joint venture projects. As the Minister knows, I have mentioned two or three different schemes in various speeches.

More importantly, are the Government saying that they are not prepared to adopt or even to think about any of those alternative ways of raising money from the private sector? British Rail is prevented from raising that money at present because of Treasury rules with which no other European railway has to contend. Those are the constraints that I want to change. Are the Government not prepared to consider that possibility?

Mr. Freeman: The Government are anxious to promote —and do promote—true joint venture projects with the private sector. There are many examples of that, ranging from the extension of the docklands light railway to the construction of toll bridges.

The hon. Gentleman did not answer my question. I asked him specifically: if British Rail borrowed from the private sector and that debt was on its balance sheet, would the shadow Chief Secretary and shadow Chancellor count that as a public sector obligation? Yes or no? The hon. Gentleman cannot answer that question— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should answer the question—yes or no?

Mr. Prescott: It is not a matter of a strict yes or no —[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] Those who know anything about financing such matters know that it is a question of judging whether such expenditure is considered to be part of the borrowing requirements that the Treasury is obliged to finance. It is a question of interpretation. It is not necessary for some arrangements because if British Rail was privatised completely and wanted to borrow *[Interruption.]* Does the Minister want to listen, or is he content just to look around proudly? It is strange that an accountant should think that questions about the financing of British Rail can be answered with a straight yes or no, when the very body to which he has referred has produced 40-odd pages to explain it. That work has been carried out by the top 100 firms of accountants in this country. It is all there if the Minister wants to read the technical jargon. He could, of course, read what I stated in the document, "Moving into Europe", which deals with the financing of the channel tunnel link, and which his Department bought off me for £75.

Mr. Freeman: I am afraid that the House is still not enlightened. Perhaps I can enlighten the hon. Gentleman. The report to which he has referred does not answer the question. That is why it is wrong——

Mr. Prescott: No.

Mr. Freeman: But the report does not seek to answer the question. That is why I am answering the question that the City and taxpayers will ask and which the hon. Gentleman cannot answer.

Let me make progress and answer some of the other points which have been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch asked for a clear statement on the role of the railways. I am glad to repeat on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that we believe that rail has an important role to play in this decade, in not only relieving congestion on the roads but moving the freight of industry. It is a vital artery for the movement of our products abroad through the channel tunnel. We believe that rail has a most important part to play.

My hon. Friend raised the investment appraisal regime. Now is not the time to go into the detail of the pros and cons of the present system of appraising rail investment projects versus road investment. The Department will publish shortly an academic paper which will explain how the present procedure works and why it is not possible to compare road investment programmes directly with rail investment programmes. I hope that the paper will help my hon. Friend.

If we appraised road investment on a cost-benefit basis and appraised rail investment on exactly the same basis, what would happen? We would substantially increase the amount of road building. That is not what my hon. Friend wants and, I suspect, not what the House wants. At the end of the day, the balance between road and rail investment is a matter of ministerial judgment. For the next three years, as my right hon. and learned Friend has already announced, the balance is clearly on the side of rail investment. In the next three years, it is possible that British Rail, London Underground and light rapid transit systems will invest more than the total investment in the trunk road programme in England for the first time in 25 years.

Mr. Snape: On the Minister's last point, is he telling us that, if the notional value of the time saved by every public transport passenger was treated in exactly the same way as the notional value of the time saved by every car driver, we would still spend far more on roads than railways?

Mr. Freeman: The straight answer is yes. When one evaluates road investment, one evaluates both user and non-user benefits. One seeks to ascribe to all motorists benefits in speedier journeys. The plain fact is that, if one appraised rail investment on exactly the same basis as we presently appraise roads and ignored the fare contribution by passengers, we would build more roads.

Mr. Adley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Freeman: If my hon. Friend will permit me, I will answer the points that he made in the debate before I give way. That will be the last time that I give way, because the House is anxious to make progress. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] At least the House is anxious to make progress so that I can deal with the other relevant points that were raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch drew a distinction between the various sectors of British Rail and the different competitive forces that act on it. He was right to do so. The competitive pressures on InterCity are great. It faces competition not only from aircraft but from long-distance coaches and cars. Network SouthEast is virtually a monopoly and the competitive forces are different. If one seeks to create competitive pressures on British Rail, one must think about different solutions for different sectors. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to introduce competitive pressures on a mass transit railway such as Network SouthEast. Yet for InterCity, it is important to appreciate that there are healthy pressures on it as an operation.

My hon. Friend also asked me about the citizens charter and its relevance to rail transport. He will have to await the publication of the citizens charter in due course, but we and British Rail accept the importance of improving the quality of information available to passengers, the accountability of management, the reward for good performance by management, redress procedures and, indeed, compensation.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend's officials will have told him, as they have told all his predecessors, that it is not possible to establish an honest and fair comparison of the true costs of rail and road. Why do the German Government seem to have found no difficulty in doing that? The Government railway commission set up by Chancellor Kohl is specifically charged with bringing out all the facts of this matter, so that German politicians can make decisions based on honest and straightforward comparisons.

Mr. Freeman: I, too, have talked to officials and politicians in Germany about this. They are very worried about the parlous financial state of the German railways' excessive debt structure and about the sizeable subsidy, which is much larger than ours. Part of the remit of the commission is to determine whether it can emulate the experience of other countries, including our own.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) read a speech about the disabled, which I shall study and discuss with officials responsible for our disablement unit. Our public transportation leads Europe in what we do for the disabled. It is not good enough yet, but we have a good record. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman after I have studied his speech and taken advice on it.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) for reminding the House of the investment record—£800 million in the year just ended, and about £1 billion for the year just begun. It is useful to remember that British Rail already compensates people in certain circumstances. Under its ex gratia scheme, £2·5 million a year in cash and vouchers for rail journeys is paid out, and £4 million a year is spent on extending season tickets.

I apologise for missing the speech by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). He and the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) asked me to deal with the public service obligation. We do not agree with the CTCC's argument that the PSO can be disaggregated into line-specific grants. It is a grant made in aggregate for a level of service provided by the supported sectors, Network SouthEast and the regional railways. We measure it using the best available yardstick, which is the number of train miles run. I accept that that means that British Rail can vary the level of service on some lines—it can reduce services if there is a lack of demand, but, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, it sometimes increases services too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) advanced arguments for the Ove Arup route which I well understand. The Government will take decisions as soon as possible on the right route to recommend for further consideration. King's Cross is not a buffer station, and whichever route is chosen to come into King's Cross it is intended to run services beyond King's Cross to the north, up the east and west coast main lines.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) talked about running buses to supplement rail services—an interesting and constructive point on which I shall reflect. If it is impossible for legal reasons for British Rail to offer such bus services, I shall pursue the matter further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who is not in his place, mentioned the length of time taken to reach a decision on the channel tunnel rail link. But the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East is arguing the case for another six months in a new Parliament to reach a final decision on the link. The Government, taking the matter more seriously, will try to reach a decision as quickly as possible, and we shall certainly not defer it for as long as the hon. Gentleman implied.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred to the Guide Bridge terminal. I shall repeat the assurance that I have already given him. I understand the significance for British Rail of making a decision between Stafford Park and Guide Bridge, and I repeat what my right hon. and learned Friend said—the decision will be taken by BR by the summer. I shall be visiting Manchester later in the summer, and I am sure that a decision will have been taken by then. I was not aware of the sleeper train problem, but I shall look into the matter and perhaps even use the service myself. I shall examine the problems raised by the hon. Member on behalf of himself and his colleagues and write to him.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) implied that the reorganisation of British Rail into business sectors was aimed at fattening up British Rail for privatisation. He is wrong. The process was begun by the first Bob Reid in the early 1980s, and it has been continued logically by the present chairman. The reorganisation of British Rail is inconsistent with some of the forms of privatisation suggested for British Rail. The Government have not yet reached a decision on the timing or the form of privatisation but the reorganisation is not tied up with privatisation.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South raised a number of points, and I shall deal briefly with the most important, Bradford electrification. We provided £26 million resource cover for the infrastructure on the assumption that the

West Yorkshire passenger transport authority would be happy to proceed with leasing. For understandable reasons, it chose not to run the risk that, when the stock was bought, the lease would be classified as debt. Because there was a slight risk of that, it preferred, although there would be a delay, to seek the credit approval route. I understand that there may be an increase in the cost of the rolling stock, and I shall take that into account. I hope that there will not be. I hope that the tender price will be extended to October. I am prepared to consider the balance between trading and non-trading credit approval for the balance of the rolling stock, which I hope that the West Yorkshire PTA will be able to proceed with.

Mr. Cryer: When will the Minister tell the West Yorkshire PTA when he will make a decision about the rolling stock? As he knows, with the question mark over leasing, it is important for the PTA to know when it can go ahead. It has already incurred almost £200,000-worth of design expenditure for the electrification scheme, and it always seems to be hanging in the balance. It wants certainty pretty soon. Furthermore, the sooner that it can get cracking, the sooner the scheme can be completed and put into operation.

Mr. Freeman: I have already told the West Yorkshire PTA that I cannot give it any assurances until the public expenditure survey round is completed, and that comes to fruition at the time of the autumn statement in the first week in November. I can do nothing about that timetable.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East asked about the public service obligation grant. This was increased to £600 million in 1990-91. It was up to £100 million in the year. This year, it will be at least £775 million. If the hon. Gentleman had read the summer supplementary estimate, he would have seen provision for an increase in the PSO. It may be higher. The balance of the division of the increase in the external financing limit between the PSO and debt has not been decided. It depends on agreement between BR and the Government. We are prepared to increase the PSO where that is justified. As we have made clear over the past six months, Network SouthEast's PSO is a target. It will be extremely difficult to achieve break-even by March 1993. Therefore, my right hon. and learned Friend, in the context of this year's autumn statement and as settlement of the internal finance round for the next three years with British Rail, will discuss with British Rail what is a realistic target. If changes have to be made, they will be made.

Mr. Prescott: There is no point in saying that we must wait for the public expenditure round, because the Secretary of State changed that a few weeks ago by going for the extra money.

Some of what has been said today is to be welcomed and shows a serious approach to the problem. However, can I press the Minister on an issue that is important to both sides of the House? He said that the Opposition had claimed that the review of the channel tunnel plans would lead to a delay. That is a bit cheeky, because, when we advocated that all the routes should be looked at before a decision was reached, the previous Secretary of State said that that would cause a delay, so he would not do it. However, now there is to be a review. It is important that the reports on the review are made available so that we understand the judgments. We reserve the right to look at the judgments, because there has been a great deal of controversy about the cost structures involved.

Will the Secretary of State make a statement before the House rises for the summer recess on the channel tunnel investment? Am I correct in believing that at the Association of Metropolitan Authorities conference, which the Minister and I attended, the hon. Gentleman said that the environmental assessment of the route would take the best part of two or three years, and that the Government would not have to make a decision before then? If that is so, a six-month review within that period is not such a big deal, especially if we get the decision right.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to what I said at the conference. I cannot give him the assurance that my right hon. and learned Friend will make a statement before the end of July. It is important to get the decision right. I said at the conference that the environmental impact assessment of the western portion of the route would take about a year. An environmental impact assessment can be written only when we know which route we are assessing.

The hon. Gentleman withdrew the earlier Labour party support that the newspapers thought it was giving for the route through Stratford. The hon. Gentleman reserved his position on all the preferred routes, which is to be welcomed, as it shows that he has an open mind.

Sir Philip Goodhart: On the question of rail freight and the channel tunnel, I know that my hon. Friend is aware of the problems that face my constituents; indeed, he has taken a great deal of trouble in considering them. The impact for my constituents will come as soon as the channel tunnel is opened. Under current arrangements, much of the rail freight is due to rumble over the already congested lines through my constituency. Has British Rail carried out a proper survey of the length of line between Tonbridge and Reading, which would provide an alternative route for a great deal of the freight?

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is well aware of the Tonbridge-Reading route for freight. When a decision is taken on which preferred route to recommend for further study, including planning permission, the transportation of freight will be an important consideration that my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues will take into account.

I commend the Bill to the House. The Conservative party has the right policies for railways. We have clearly declared our policy for transferring more freight from road to rail, and we have confirmed the emphasis that we are placing on combined transport. We have said that we want to end BR's monopoly over both passenger and freight services. We have policies for the privatisation of British Rail, and they are supported by even more of the electorate than was evident six or 12 months ago. We welcome that support.

We have a massive investment programme, which I have outlined tonight. Some £500 million per year was spent by the Labour party when it was in government in the 1970s, but expenditure is now running at £1 billion per year—a substantial increase.

Mr. Cryer: The Minister said that the Government want to transfer freight from road to rail whenever

[Mr. Cryer]

possible. What does he think about British Rail's policy on Speedlink, and is it not ironic that the demise of Speedlink comes just as we are having this debate?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman's point is a fitting one on which to end, because the attitude to Speedlink separates the parties. Speedlink, with a revenue of £45 million this year, would have lost £40 million—*[Interruption.]* It was £30 million last year, and it would have been £40 million this year. Speedlink was a service intended to take single wagons from terminals through marshalling yards to other destinations. It was a service more appropriate to the 1950s than to the 1990s—similar to the ideology of some Labour Members. British Rail must now convert that freight into train load freight, which is much more competitive than road freight. I am glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that 70 per cent. of the Speedlink services have been converted into train load profitable freight. That reflects not only British Rail's positive attitude, but the Government's positive attitude towards rail. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Wood.]*

Further proceedings postponed pursuant to Order [5 July]

BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD (FINANCE) BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase in the sums payable under any other enactment out of or into the National Loans Fund or the Consolidated Fund, being an increase attributable to any provision of the Act increasing the limit in section 42(6) of the Transport Act 1968 to £3,000 million or such greater sum not exceeding £5,000 million as the Secretary of State may by order specify. —*[Mr. Wood.]*

British Railways Board (Finance) Bill

Postponed proceedings resumed.

Bill immediately considered in Committee pursuant to Order this day.

[MISS BETTY BOOTHROYD *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

INCREASED BORROWING LIMIT FOR BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

10.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In the past few hours the House has enjoyed a wide-ranging debate on part of our national heritage—our railways. I am pleased to see the Secretary of State and even more pleased to see the Minister for Public Transport who has been present for nearly all the proceedings and who, characteristically, always gives a good parliamentary reply.

Britain's railways are owned by the public and, in the end, accountability for their operation and investment in their infrastructure and equipment finishes here. In that cause, we are being asked considerably to increase British Rail's borrowing limits. It is no secret that the Bill has come as something of a surprise to the Government and to the public.

There has been much controversy about British Rail's funding and the extent to which it has so far relied on the sale of real estate. I understand that the crisis has come about not because of a reduction in traffic or in estimated revenue from the rail business, but as a result of a turn down in the income from real estate, something which it shares, alas, with the health service.

We can hardly oppose the investment which will arise from the clause—at least I cannot—but there are many questions to be asked about the quality of management and, in particular, the structure that the Government place around the management.

I am sorry to see the Secretary of State leaving, because I particularly want to refer to his recent speech. But if he is not able to be present perhaps we can pursue the matter in correspondence.

It is essential that the House has confidence in the investment. We are now authorising money as if we were shareholders of a firm. I want to put before the House some reasons why we should not invest that money without asking some severe questions.

Some of those questions relate to management and some to the Government. I must confess that it is sometimes difficult to establish where the boundary between them lies. Even the Minister may not know, because such decisions have taken place over several years, long before he took up his present office.

The first matter that I wish to raise—this is why the Secretary of State's departure is unfortunate—is the claim that the Government are now changing direction and emphasising and looking to freight. I did not get that message from the Secretary of State's speech today. I understood the Secretary of State's speech to be about the British Rail monopoly, as he called it, and the means of breaking a monopoly, which I do not believe exists. Nowhere, except in London for commuters and for specialised traffic such as post—that is not a monopoly—does British Rail have a monopoly. The Secretary of State talked, as far as I understood it, about permitting different types of operator to operate trains or services over British Rail track in a way not carried out before. I see the Minister nodding. Has he not heard of Foster Yeoman? Its operation is well known and may be controversial. I see no distinction between what Foster Yeoman is doing and what the Secretary of State purported to want.

10.30 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) asked the Secretary of State about the fate of Speedlink. The Minister of State said, using British Rail statistics which may be right—let us hope that they are better than British Rail's timekeeping—that 70 per cent. of Speedlink is retained. He said that the system had been changed to whole trains. Axing Speedlink, which was as easy to remember as a label as InterCity, sends out the wrong signal. At the very time at which the Secretary of State says, "Let us transfer freight to the railways", Speedlink is axed.

If 70 per cent. of Speedlink is being retained—I hope that it is—surely there should be an announcement that from now on, Speedlink will be confined to full trainloads, which may come under a different business division, but which will keep the same brand names although wagons will no longer be collected from private sidings. There would have been relatively little fuss. Either the Government or the management have kicked themselves in the teeth.

Mr. Cryer: The Minister talked about 70 per cent. of Speedlink being retained in full trainloads. He did not say what was happening in rural areas, such as Cornwall or in Scotland. He did not say how many extra wagonloads will be put on to the roads in the areas in which trainloads are most likely to be rare—that is, in the very rural areas in which the roads are too narrow and restricted adequately to carry any increase in lorryloads.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The estimated cost of collecting wagons and taking them into marshalling yards or into full trains may not be the real cost. The Minister is an accountant and he knows that one can do all sorts of things with figures and produce all sorts of results which are difficult to challenge, but not difficult to create.

As the Minister says, we are investing in freight. The history of cross-channel freight is extraordinary. We have known that there will be a channel link, whatever its merits, for the five or six years since the direct decision was taken in Canterbury. Even today, as was instanced by the exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South and the Minister, British Rail has not designated the locations of its freight depots or villages, although it may have suggested broadly the areas in which the depots will be. My information is that British Rail is conducting a Dutch auction. It is trying to get various public and private bodies to put up money for the investment required. As usual, British Rail wants to carry out the work with the lowest amount possible from the public purse, which has meant a delay in the timetable.

Boardrooms are deciding now what to do about transport. Every hon. Member has received a glossy publication advocating the great cross-channel freightway.

[Mr. Spearing]

British Rail has not said where the freight collection centres will be. I do not know whether that is the responsibility of the Government or of the management. However, it must be a combination of both, or one or the other. Is that the sort of management in which we can have confidence? I suggest that a big question mark lies over both intranational and international freight.

Only today, I heard a report that a plant supplying BR with some 700 tonnes of liquid a week in seven bogey wagons—I will not name the plant, because I must check the facts—can no longer send it by rail. BR says that that the cost of sending the locomotive to take the train out of the depot, no doubt paid by the public, is too great, and that the cargo must be sent by road in future. As I have said, I will not name the plant, but I shall talk to the Minister about it.

The circumstances are not even the same as those applying to Speedlink. Although seven wagons may not sound very many, 700 tonnes of liquid is about double the weight carried by a typical InterCity passenger train. If the report is true, the management must give some reason for the decision. It may be said that this is an extraordinary development, given that Government policy is moving in the opposite direction, but I have enough experience of British Rail management to know that such extraordinary things do happen.

I am not a wholehearted admirer of traditional British Rail management; there is always room for improvement. Management has not been adventurous enough in certain respects, and has been illogical in others. That does not mean, however, that the current changes are necessarily right.

Last week, Sir Bob Reid—as distinct from Sir Robert Reid—was examined by the Select Committee on Transport. He admitted that the day trains north of London would not be ready in time for the opening of the channel tunnel. Let me give a cricket commentator's welcome to the arrival of the Secretary of State, who has just returned to the Chamber. That admission needs some explanation: it is down to either the Government or BR's management, and at some stage the Committee will need to know the details. The time flow—as it is called in business—for creating the tunnel is far longer than that for creating rolling stock.

What is even worse is that Sir Bob had to admit—I was sitting at the back, but I believe that I heard him correctly—that the sleeper trains north of London, and those operating from London, would not be ready in time either. He also said—an extraordinary statement, coming from a railwayman—that the bulk of the sleeper traffic would come from north of London anyway. I find that hard to credit: London and the south-east have a huge market for sleeper trains to Rome, the alps and the French riviera, not to mention Brussels. I should have thought that the London area would provide a very good ready market for sleeper trains travelling all over the Continent. That, too, does not fill me with confidence in the management.

The Minister mentioned Heathrow. Anyone who has attended railway debates here will be astonished at the amount of time devoted to the Heathrow Express Railway (No. 2) Bill. What was the objection? There was not enough railway. Proper junctions with Southern and Western region, enabling InterCity to run trains from all parts of Britain—or allowing a fast inter-urban Network SouthEast service to operate—are not being provided. The line is being installed not as a proper railway to serve Heathrow, but as a rail shuttle for central London. This is not a railway plan in the classical sense of the term. Mr Hudson, or whatever his name was, would have done better in York 150 years ago: he had more vision then than the Government have today. The Government do not appear to have much vision in that respect.

The Minister referred to crossrail, which we all welcome. However, it only duplicates what the Metropolitan railway did over 100 years ago. A little-known fact is that Liverpool Street was linked to the Metropolitan. The services stopped around 1890. The traffic went all the way through to Paddington, so it is not a new concept. So far, the plan is not to use the continental gauge, despite the great open spaces of Brunel's Great Western Railway main line that could be linked to it, were it to be built to that gauge.

I turn to our Adjournment debate on 7 June last, concerning reorganisation. The investment of money in stock and people depends on the efficiency of British Rail's organisation. I shall not rehearse that debate in full. The courteous Minister said that the Opposition are wedded to the idea that what is good for British Rail is good for everybody but that the Government believe in reorganising British Rail to serve the needs of the traveller. On the face of it, that appears to have merit. I am not convinced, however, that traditionally, British Rail's management has served the needs of the traveller.

Tonight the Minister for Public Transport said that the separation of the business into separate businesses has been under consideration for about 10 years and that Sir Robert Reid, mark 1, began to introduce it. If the so-called organisation for quality programme had been known in 1981 or 1982, I do not think that it would have got very far. It contains very good elements, but it ought not to be taken too far. If one travels from King's Cross to Doncaster or from St. Pancras to Kettering, one wants certain facilities to be provided. InterCity Ltd., as it used to be, from Cardiff to Paddington, was taken over and became a brand image—rather like Pulman. People knew what they were getting. If a train is on time and properly rostered, there is nothing wrong with that. It is a good marketing technique. But to take a much bigger step is something which I question.

I hope that Sir Bob Reid will find my oil industry example to be appropriate in this context. Oil business money comes mainly from bulk users of fuel in factories, garages and industry. That does not mean, however, that one puts skilled marketing men in charge of an oil refinery. Petrochemical engineers are the people who have to work it. One has to blend the experience of the technicians who run the refinery with the marketing skills of those who have to sell the fuel. Up to a point, that is what InterCity and the suburban railways did.

For Sir Bob Reid to tell the Select Committee last week that British Rail intended to have seven distinct businesses that would make a nonsense of the old geographical distribution of the railway network and that it would create within those seven businesses 30 profit centres is going far too far and is creating tensions and difficulties that otherwise would not exist. That was all aired in the debate on 7 June and was put to Sir Bob mark II in the hearing before the Select Committee last week. "Ah" said Sir Bob, "Now we will have single responsibility instead of

the matrix." That matrix is the double layer of management that has caused some difficulty. It has caused difficulty because it has been taken too far. Now, it is being taken to extraordinary lengths. Again, I dealt with that in the debate on 7 June and I shall not enlarge upon it now.

10.45 pm

The railway is now having its coherent operation disrupted. A railway consists of the skills of civil engineers, telecom and signal men, the design and supply of mechanical engineering stock, the maintenance of that stock and the running of the stock by crews. It is a complex operation, usually spread over many hundreds of miles and running 24 hours a day among a shifting group of people. To smash up the historic organisation of our mainlines and pretend that one can share King's Cross between two different businesses—or, as I explained in the Adjournment debate, in the case of Stratford, two railway divisions and six profit centres—is asking for trouble. We have trouble. Experienced railway men who will not be brow beaten by the dangling of promotion prospects—we all know how important promotion prospects are in public life—have created internal problems in the management of British Rail. Those problems have been well ventilated in the Sunday press and were covered in an article in *The Independent on Sunday* last week.

I ask myself what analogues there are in the world for the investment that we are about to approve and for such a novel means of railway operation. I have scanned all the railway literature from Mr. Welsby and Sir Robert Reid and I find no voluntary announcement of any analogue to this remarkable managerial revolution. The only one that I can think of, in a semi-amateur way, is the United States. In the United States railway investment is in the hands of private enterprise, but it is co-ordinated by the inter-state commerce commission. That has always been the case because the federal Government believe that proper investment in the railways and federal supervision are necessary for the nation's economy.

There are many different railways and different users hiring trains or using railways over enormous distances. They probably run a train a day or perhaps two a week. I suppose that Amtrak is something like InterCity, perhaps running one or two trains a day or two trains a week over different tracks. That is a distinct business, although it is heavily subsidised by the federal Government.

If that is the only example that anyone can dredge up, it is not an analogue at all because of the intense operation of British Rail over a small area relative to the United States. We do not know whether the Government will proceed to privatisation, because it depends on the outcome of the next general election. However, if they do and if the new reorganisation in which we are putting money tonight is in place and is not working well—let us hope that my fears are wrong—we will have scrambled the eggs. It will be difficult to alter the proposals that will result in changes in the coming months. It is no use the Minister thinking that that can be stopped, because it has been prepacked, people are in place, equipment has been bought and offices and posts have been offered and accepted.

I have grave doubts about the receptacles into which we are pouring investment. We all want that investment, but the Government's track record on the railways does not inspire confidence. BR's management structure, as approved by the Government and defended by Sir Bob and his friends, is market oriented. Markets are important, but should they overcome the technical and logical necessities of a complex operation such as a railway? I would say not. The optimum combination of both is important, but alas, we do not have that.

Mr. Gregory: In speaking to this crucial clause, I should like to comment on how property will be affected.

The Bill raises the ceiling of the borrowing ability of the British Railways Board. It is interesting to explore whether the Bill's provisions on property sales are necessary. Last year, property sales and lettings amounted to £223 million, which, sadly, was down from £412 million. Revenue from property sales and development premiums fell a staggering 60 per cent. to £121 million.

I find it strange that only one new office project—in St. Albans—was started last year. One wonders what British Rail's property board was up to and whether it was gainfully employed. Station trading, which it organised, rose only 6 per cent. to £31·1 million, which was pretty pathetic compared with the good results of other parts of the high street network. If the Committee agrees to increase the board's borrowing ability, will station trading, improve?

I am pleased that traders invested £3·5 million in modernising station retail and catering outlets last year. That is the right approach—a joint partnership. I should have liked the clause to provide for greater participation, but, as no amendment was tabled, it would be inappropriate to suggest such a change. It is unfortunate that we have not had such an opportunity. It is right to mention that and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to it.

More property developments and joint participation will lead to an improvement in British Rail because it will become more customer-oriented and because there will be less pressure on the public purse.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): We are being asked to sanction a significant increase in expenditure on British Rail, but will extra investment be made in areas that have not received it in recent years or in areas where it has been inadequate?

I make no apology for the fact that I shall plead for Scotland and especially for the north of Scotland where we are extremely worried about whether the rail network will survive at all in view of the way in which it has been treated by British Rail in the past few years. I have listened to many debates on railways and I have heard some hon. Members bleat and complain about the poverty of their service, but they do not know how lucky they are. In terms of quality, speed and efficiency the service to the north of Scotland was substantially better 120 years ago than it is today. The same could be said for the volume of the service, although the reason for that is more understandable. However, that is not proof of a commitment to quality or investment.

One relevant factor that I have tried to persuade Sir Bob Reid that he should be more apprised of than most people is the fact that it has traditionally been accepted from the day the line was laid that the east coast main line ran from London to Aberdeen. It no longer does so; it effectively terminates at Edinburgh where the electrification of the line finishes. I have had some extraordinary exchanges with British Rail about the implications of that fact. I have been told, for example, that the electrification

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

of the line between Edinburgh and Aberdeen would make no noticeable difference to the service. If that were true, why have we spent so much money on electrifying the line between London and Edinburgh? It is a preposterous proposition. It is true that the speed of the journey was significantly less a hundred years ago than it is today and that electrification will add to the journey time from Aberdeen to London.

There is now one sleeper from Aberdeen to London and, in my view, it starts in the middle of the afternoon. How many people want to take a sleeper at 9.20 pm? The last sleeper to the north leaves at 10.5 pm. I cannot believe that it is impossible to provide a sleeper that meets the public's needs. The timing is, of course, deliberate. It is timed to leave when no one wants to use it; British Rail say that there is no demand and so it is cancelled.

We are told that it is a matter for British Rail—if it can establish a scheme that brings a return of 8 per cent. on investment, all to the good. That is a matter of opinion. Independent, non-railway people have shown a better rate of return than British Rail, but the question is whether we provide a service to main centres. If the returns had been the only criteria, one wonders whether the lines to the north of Scotland would have been built. People had more vision in earlier times than they do today.

Such investment as has been made in Scotland has been a considerable embarrassment to British Rail. It has introduced super new sprinter trains and express trains. They are wonderful when the doors stay shut and when the carriages stay coupled, but it is a lottery to drive such a train, because one is never sure what will go wrong. We were told that the great thing about the new sprinter trains was that they had a compartment for two bicycles. Unfortunately, the European Community introduced hygiene regulations which meant that it was no longer possible to serve sandwiches in the existing conditions. British Rail decided that the way to solve the problem was to prohibit bicycles and to install extra refrigeration facilities for sandwiches. I am pleased to say that a sustained campaign by the cycling community in Scotland has forced British Rail to reverse that policy, although, presumably, there will now be no sandwiches. It would be hilarious if it were not a serious indictment of the quality of service that is supposed to be provided.

Mr. Cryer: It is the EEC.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman, from his known anti-European position——

Mr. Cryer: Anti-EEC.

Mr. Bruce: Oh, anti-EEC. Never mind; from his anti-Labour party policy—currently, at the moment, position——

Mr. Cryer: The leadership has changed; I have not.

Mr. Bruce: That is true; I give the hon. Gentleman credit for that.

One would have assumed that British Rail might have had some idea of the forthcoming regulations when it ordered the trains.

11 pm

Mr. Spearing: Has the hon. Gentleman heard the accusation by Mr. Peter Rayner that, alas—contrary to what had happened with previous sorts of stock—there was not sufficient testing, and that the design of the train that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and other trains, was forced on British Rail, via the engineers, by people who perhaps did not have the right sort of experience? Is not that a possible reason for the problem?

Mr. Bruce: It is a possible reason for the problem, but the thrust of my argument is that I suspect that it was budgetary constraints that forced British Rail to design the trains to a budget specification that did not really meet the operating requirements. Basically, we have rolling stock on the cheap which, ultimately, may cost us very much more than it would have cost to design rolling stock equipped to do the job. That is the fundamental point which I am anxious to convey to the Minister.

We seek a commitment from British Rail and the Government. The argument between the two is not an edifying spectacle, and it is certainly not one which makes Conservative candidates in the north of Scotland comfortable. I do not really care whether British Rail can find an 8 per cent. rate of return, or whether the Government come up with a direct grant to make that happen. What I do care about is that given the contribution that the north of Scotland makes to exports in the United Kingdom, and from the United Kingdom, it deserves a decent rail service and it is not getting one. There is no evidence whatever that the extra money that is to be voted through tonight is likely to make the slightest bit of difference. That is my fundamental concern.

I make no apology for saying that Scotland has a unique export record. The north of Scotland in particular has an export-led economy. A substantial proportion of the output of our industries in the north of Scotland goes direct to the European Community markets. I believe that people who serve those markets are entitled to be connected properly to the European rail network. They are not being given that opportunity at present, and they are well aware of that fact. I can assure the Minister that the campaign will not abate or go away.

I have in my constituency the line from Aberdeen to Inverness, which I accept, in the simple narrow determinants of British Rail policy, is not a profitable line. But I must tell the Minister that it is an absolutely essential line, and I am absolutely sure that any economist would be able to prove conclusively that, in terms of the broad benefit to the community, that line is an economic asset. After all, we also have a road network in the north of Scotland which does not benefit from the investment offered elsewhere in the United Kingdom. As statistics that I managed to squeeze out of the Scottish Office proved, the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness has the worst accident record per vehicle mile of any road in Scotland, and an investment commitment that is not comparable. This is not a debate about roads, but my point is that the competition between road and rail has to be seen in the light of where the investment is going. In our area, it is not going into either sector to any significant extent.

Under pressure, the director of ScotRail admitted to me that, in terms of demand, he could operate more trains between Aberdeen and Inverness. The trouble is that putting on an extra train costs money, and that is an

investment which the director is not prepared to make because it is a step: he has to guarantee a full train. Suppose that he has one and half train loads of people. If he decides to put an extra train on and gets only 1·6 train loads, he may not make enough money to justify the investment. The fact that he is leaving 60 per cent. of the people at the station, or driving on the roads, may not be a matter of concern to him, but it is a matter of concern to the local community.

People in my constituency have informed me of instances of British Rail staff going along the platform at certain stations at certain times, saying, "We advise you not to board this train as we do not consider the load is safe." Whether or not the staff had the power to do that, they were obviously genuinely concerned about the level of overcrowding.

I raised that matter with the junior Minister some time ago and his written answer was breathtaking. It boiled down to the fact that there was no evidence. The Clapham junction crash was cited in support of the argument that one was less likely to suffer serious injury when a train crashed if one was standing than if one was sitting. That is impossible to believe. We have only this month introduced the compulsory wearing of seat belts in cars. If it is not safe to sit in the rear of a car without a seat belt, how can it be safe to stand in an overcrowded train? That kind of argument does not stand up to analysis.

Far from getting extra trains, BR has decided that the way to get out of the bind is to increase fares to deter people from using its trains so that overcrowding can be reduced. Instead of adding to the service, BR has decided to deter passengers in an attempt to eliminate the overcrowding problem. There is no evidence that the Government are addressing that problem.

This is the Government's responsibility. It is no good the Minister saying that management is a matter for BR. The evidence that I have quoted shows that BR's management may be perfectly reasonable in terms of BR's objectives of solving a problem or reducing liability, but the Government must determine whether the service is being provided, whether the demand is being met and whether the wider community needs have been considered.

I regret to say that all the correspondence and contacts that I have had with Ministers show that they have washed their hands of the matter and passed the buck straight back to BR which effectively passed it back to the Government, saying that the level of support that it receives does not allow it to deal with the problem and that the criteria and operating circumstances are such that it cannot provide a viable service.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred to the Speedlink service. The implications of that closure are particularly critical for areas like the north of Scotland. I accept what the Minister says about a service with a turnover of £45 million that is losing at least £30 million or £40 million. That is an unconscionable amount of money in proportion to the total turnover. Clearly such losses cannot be sustained indefinitely. I do not have a problem with that. However, as the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said, simply to terminate the service gives the wrong signals, but it does more than that in areas like the north of Scotland. The opportunities for securing train loads is somewhat limited. It is not impossible and some operators are trying to put train loads together. However, they are being quoted prices that in some cases are 110 or 115 per cent. more than they were before. That is a substantial additional charge to absorb.

An operator in my part of the world said that the consequence of being kicked off Speedlink would be an extra 20,000 lorries a year on the road between Durham and Aberdeen. That is not BR's responsibility, but it is a matter of considerable concern in terms of safety and efficiency of transport and travel to those who will be stuck behind those lorries.

There are some meetings of minds with the Government about whether there should be a role for the private sector. My party and I have no difficulty in being prepared to discuss with Ministers how we might expand that role to improve the service and increase efficiency. I would go further: it takes an unconscionable talent to lose the amount of money to which I have referred on that degree of turnover. No one could do worse. However, we must explore ways of attracting traffic back on to the railways instead of giving it up. Clearly, that course is not being pursued.

I am somewhat sceptical about supporting clause 1. If I can be literally boorish and speak in terms of pigs and troughs, we in the north of Scotland are pretty fed up with not getting the degree of investment that is in accordance with the economic contribution that we make to the United Kingdom economy, to our exports, and to the importance of the industries that we sustain, among which are the oil and gas industries, and the paper and whisky industries. Both the Government and British Rail have shown an utter inflexibility in accepting that we are entitled to a constructive response. People in the north of Scotland are looking, first, for the continuation of the existing rail network; secondly, for an investment in rolling stock, in terms of both quality and quantity, that will meet the genuine demand and, thirdly, for full integrated access to the European rail network that will be opened up by the channel tunnel. We are not getting any of those things. My regret is that tonight we shall be supporting a clause that substantially increases British Rail's borrowing, but which leaves our part of Scotland continuing to be deprived of anything like the investment that we need if we are to make the contribution that we can make and are making to the national economy.

Mr. Cryer: On Second Reading, I asked the Minister whether the expenditure that is listed in clause 1 contains sufficient provision for the amount of money that British Rail will need to contribute to the Bradford electrification scheme. I am not asking, "How much?" because that has not yet been negotiated, but I should like the confirmation that the Minister probably forgot to give when he replied earlier.

I am extremely disappointed that we have to wait until the November Treasury round. As lawyers say, that shows "beyond peradventure" that the Department of Transport is tied hand and foot by the Treasury. The scheme is all ready to go; £200,000 has been spent on the design work, but nothing can happen because of the Treasury restrictions that it must be included in the general round of expenditure. Given the proximity of a general election, the Government will be more likely to approve than to reject it.

I hope that the Minister will answer my next points because I should like them to be on the record. I refer first to his closing comments on Second Reading when he said

[Mr. Cryer]

that Speedlink divides the Conservative and Labour parties, as though he were proud of closing Speedlink. I shall remind him what that means. First, it means that some freight that is now carried by rail will have to be carried by road on lorries. The claim that the Conservative Government are seeking to move freight from road to rail is belied by the closure of Speedlink. Secondly, the Minister said that single wagon loads would be moving along the railways, through marshalling yards on to sidings. That is absolutely right. With the closure of Speedlink, that infrastructure will almost certainly go too. Although points, signalling equipment and rails seem perfunctory items, they have a value and, because of the financial pressures on British Rail, it will rip them out and realise their scrap value or perhaps even their transfer value for other sections of track. That will mean more costs in the future when whichever party is in government will have to come here to obtain a similar authorisation in its determination to move freight from road to rail. Single wagon traffic cannot be eliminated from British Rail, even if we have to accept that there is a cost in that over and above the bare minimum cost of transferring freight to rail.

But what about the people who live in hamlets and who want to stop the 38-tonne gross vehicle weight lorries thundering through their narrow lanes? What about the children who, to get to school, have to cross the roads down which those lorries thunder? What about the town or village traffic lights where the lorries bunch up? What about the people who are trying to sleep early in the morning as the lorries start off in first gear and rev up through the gear box, with their great weights or, if they are empty, with banging rear axles that produce a cacophony? What about the growl of the diesels, the dirt, the noise and the intrusion? Everyone realises that under the Conservatives there has been an increase in heavy lorry traffic on the roads to an unconscionable and, in many places, unacceptable degree.

In some, but not all, areas, we could reduce the amount of lorry traffic by pushing that traffic from the road on to rail. The ending of Speedlink is a move away from that desirable aim. As I said, if Speedlink is removed it will become more costly and difficult to restore the service. Many of the facilities will be sold off, again under financial pressure. British Rail will be under pressure to sell the land on which the sidings stand.

11.15 pm

It is almost certain that to close down Speedlink will be a waste of public expenditure. Grants have been provided by the Government for private sidings. They were introduced by Labour, of course, because we were genuinely committed to moving freight from the road on to rail. Those grants are now wasted. The sidings will be pulled out because there will be no traffic. In some cases, the sidings will not take whole train loads because they will not be long enough to accommodate them.

If the Minister wants to go into the next general election on a transport policy of standing by the closure of Speedlink, we shall be happy to fight on it. We are committed genuinely to move freight from road to rail and to make it succeed.

Mr. Freeman: I know that the House will want me to answer hon. Members' points extremely briefly.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to Speedlink, as did the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). British Rail expects half a million tonnes of freight to move from rail to the roads. That is equivalent to only 80 heavy lorries a day. The hon. Gentlemen can do the maths. I calculate that, at £30 million, that is a subsidy of £1,000 per lorry journey. That is not sensible. I am sure that the hon. Gentlemen would join me in wanting that money to be spent on moving the traffic that should not be thundering down the M1, M25 and M20 to the channel tunnel and, through proper investment, moving more freight via combined transport terminals.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: This is a serious point. The transport users in my area have complained, first, that their costs have been increased by over 100 per cent. and, secondly, that the transitional arrangements are offered only for a year. Can the Minister assure us that the figures that he quoted will still be applicable at the end of that year? Or will a lot more traffic go in after a year when no one is looking?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman will write to me about a specific customer or issue, I shall look into it. I am glad that Tigerail is now shipping for west country customers. I gather that there is good news in prospect for the grain merchants and the whisky distillers in Scotland. If the hon. Gentleman will write to me with a specific example of traffic that is not being taken up by either British Rail or the private sector running freight trains on British Rail track, I shall certainly pursue it.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) referred to property receipts. It is true that they have fallen. That is one reason why we increased the external financing limit by £400 million. We certainly want more property receipts in future years when the property market recovers.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) talked about Edinburgh-Aberdeen electrification. We are well aware of the arguments. For InterCity we have an investment appraisal test of 8 per cent. He is right in saying that it is the same for the TGV investment in France. Exactly the same financial rate of return is required, so I am not ashamed of 8 per cent. However, for the supporting railways—I am not familiar with the line between Aberdeen and Inverness, but I imagine that it is a regional railway—as the hon. Gentleman will know, appraisal of new investment is on a cost-benefit basis. If there are non-user benefits, we shall take them into account when approving new investment.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Bradford, South for not answering his point about British Rail's contribution to West Yorkshire's electrification. I can confirm that there are unlikely to be problems. It is a relatively small direct contribution for track and vehicles, and I see no reason why British Rail would not be able to honour its commitment to a scheme which I hope will proceed in the next financial year.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

INCREASED LIMIT RELATING TO COMPENSATION

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Prescott: The Minister will know that money has been used from the PSO grant for safety measures at level crossings. The Health and Safety Executive is undertaking an inquiry into problems with the doors on some inter-city trains. The Government have always said that money will be provided if that is necessary for safety reasons, so if the inquiry finds that work must be done on the doors for safety reasons, will the money be forthcoming?

Mr. Freeman: In the past financial year British Rail spent about £140 million on safety, and it is likely to spend more than £200 million on it in this financial year. When we receive the results of the HSE's investigations into the various tragic accidents, I can confirm on behalf of British Rail that if expenditure is needed to save lives, it will be given a very high priority. The Secretary of State is on his sleeper en route to Edinburgh now, and I apologise on his behalf for his absence from the final stages of the debate, but, on his behalf, I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. and learned Friend will certainly look supportively on any such investment.

Mr. Gregory: There are international agreements in respect of compensation for air and sea travel, but not for rail travel. The Government have been in the forefront of extending the Athens and Warsaw conventions——

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to confine his remarks to the clause stand part debate.

Mr. Gregory: I was under the impression, Sir, that clause 2 deals with compensation. I wanted to ask my hon. Friend whether he was thinking of following the aviation and maritime examples rather than resorting to civil litigation methods. Might we have a code of practice or guidance under the clause to assist those who lose loved ones or who are injured on the railways?

Mr. Freeman: I shall certainly look into that and write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Beith: I apologise for having had to leave the Chamber to deal with a query from an hon. Member who occupies a position of great power and influence in the building—he deals with accommodation matters.

Will the Minister look again at the public service obligation covered by the clause and at the extraordinarily illogical position in which the Government and British Rail find themselves? The Government say that they are not concerned about the service on any particular part of the network covered by the PSO; they are concerned about whether the aggregate of service overall corresponds with the total service provided in 1988, now the base year for the public service obligation. If the only issue is how many miles are run by trains on the regional railway network, why do we have to pay this money at all? What is the point of the PSO as set out in the clause?

If the invitation is thus extended to railway managers to attract as many people as they can by putting the trains where the largest number of people are, and reducing the mileage that they have to travel and thereby reducing the costs by running twice the number of trains between close urban points, rather than providing, at greater expense, a service to rural areas, why should the taxpayer subsidise that? Why should we pay for that? Why should it not be subject to the same requirements of breaking even as other parts of the railway network, or be subsidised only so far as it is a means of making the infrastructure costs correspond to the level of those borne by road services?

Surely the purpose of the public service obligation is to ensure that the railway system continues to provide services over a wide area of the country, particularly rural railways. The Minister must take account of what the Central Transport Consultative Committee told him, which is that in rural areas, 48 per cent. of the services were running on reduced services. That is 48 per cent. of services for which the grant under this clause will be paid. That is almost half the services. In some cases, as the committee pointed out, reductions were to the point at which closure was being avoided by the technicality of running a single train.

What sense does that make? The Minister must tell BR that if it wants to close the line, it should come to him with closure proposals. It should not ask him to give it taxpayers' money so that it can spend it somewhere else, while pretending that it is running a service on one of the many lines covered by the network as it was in 1988. The Minister has not answered this question. He cannot regard the CTCC as a firebrand hooligan body that never makes sensible proposals. This is a serious criticism of the Government's attitude to the PSO.

I ask the Minister again. Why have a PSO if its purpose is not to maintain the broad totality of the rail network? Why not measure the money that he is handing out against some kind of performance indicator that examines whether the service is provided over the whole of the network? If it is his view that the 1988 network is no longer appropriate, and that some of the services should not be there at all, why is that issue not considered by closure proposals and the normal process of advice? Why does he allow BR to run services down to the point of one train in one direction a day? Ought not BR to be encouraged, where it has a network to run under a PSO, to run one that meets local needs and is marketed to maximise the support for it in that area? That is not happening. If the service were marketed, that might reduce the call on the PSO for the regional railways as a whole.

There is a crisis in regional railways, and the Minister cannot dismiss it by saying that the measure is the aggregate number of miles run. This process could go a lot further. It would not be difficult for the managements of regional railways further to concentrate all the existing rolling stock in a limited number of urban areas, where there are additional passengers to be obtained. By that means, they might attempt to meet the target to reduce the PSO money referred to in the clause. Is the Minister content to let that happen?

Mr. Freeman: There is clearly a difference between the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the Government about how one fixes the PSO grant. I have made it plain that we disagree with the CTCC's view that there should be route or line specific PSO grant system. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) will remember that that was how the system was organised about 15 years ago. It was hopelessly bureaucratic and complicated. The hon. Gentleman must be saying that that is the way that he wishes to go, because that is the only

[Mr. Freeman]

alternative to the present system, in which the setting of the PSO is an iterative process. Perhaps I should briefly explain that. We do not set the PSO grant at the beginning of the year and say to British Rail, "Fix a service that suits that." British Rail has an obligation to run a system measured, broadly speaking, in train miles, as was provided on 1 April 1988. That gives BR the ability to change services and increase or decrease them on any particular line.

11.30 pm

On the question of marketing services and how we might change the PSO grant, I ask the hon. Gentleman to await our announcement on the way forward with privatisation, as we envisage it, and the way that it might affect regional railways. It is bound to involve a rediscussion of the whole issue of how the PSO grant—the social subsidy—is fixed and determined. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman wants a system not too dissimilar to the subsidising of rural bus services, where there is a specific subsidy to protect a specific service, including frequency. We have not reached that stage yet, but I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate that in greater detail on another occasion.

Mr. Beith: I must press the Minister. What is the point of paying millions of pounds to British Railway so that it can run X thousand train miles? What social purpose, what public good is served, by expending a subsidy on the achievement of a certain number of train miles? It is not a social purpose; it is not an assessment that the community needs X thousand train miles.

The PSO grant was devised on the assumption that the country needed a rail network, providing trains between various places. When Fred Mulley first set out the provision, he did not say to the House, "What this country needs is for 50,000 train miles to be run every few months." His concept was for an overall network. It does not make sense to pay out money to BR simply to achieve a mileage target. It would make sense if it were to retain a network with a reasonable level of services. It might make sense to do it in a number of other ways. I can see logic in changing the system in various ways and I can see logic in the way that the system was being run, but I cannot see any logic in saying to the taxpayer, "We will spend your money so that a certain number of miles per year will be achieved by BR."

I think that the Minister is a sensible enough economist and accountant—we both read economics in the same place at the same time—to realise that that is nonsense. It certainly does not meet the needs of those in rural areas whose services are being whittled away. I am confident of one thing—that the one train that now runs from Chatshill northwards will remain in the timetable.—*[Interruption.]* It is the normal custom for an hon. Member to ask another hon. Member to give way, rather than to make the intervention first. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) must have pulled the signal levers early sometimes—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman is not careful, I shall recall his days with the railways at Macclesfield.

That one train a day will remain in the timetable not because it is sensibly timed, not because anyone who uses it can get back from wherever he has gone, but because the only alternative is for BR to put forward closure plans. BR is dodging the requirement for closure proposals and using PSO money to run railway services where it can get the largest number of people on to them. That is not a sensible way to manage a public subsidy, and I cannot imagine that the Minister can, in any sincerity or seriousness, defend that.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Children (Deafness)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

11.34 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I am pleased to raise in this Adjournment debate the question of the early diagnosis of deaf children. It is important that there should be maximum public awareness of the problem. I hope that tonight's debate, in conjunction with last night's programme on BBC1 entitled "The Visit" by Desmond Wilcox, will help to highlight in the public mind the importance of the early diagnosis of deafness among children.

First, I want to give to the House the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), a well-respected Member of the House who is also president of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, who wishes to support my arguments tonight but is unable to be here to do so in person.

The early diagnosis of deaf children, the prescription of hearing aids, the immediate provision of education and speech training are essential if children with hearing loss are to develop communication skills and not be severely handicapped as a result of deafness.

The central message of tonight's debate is the need to establish efficient screening, diagnostic and referral services and the publication of the outcome of the results. The provision of those services is an essential pre-condition for improvement in the education of deaf children.

Arguing and campaigning for the provision of those basic services is not new. The National Deaf Children's Society and the Health Visitors Association have been campaigning for years for an increase in screening and the publishing of the results. For example, in 1979, the society held a conference in association with the department of audiology at Manchester university on early diagnosis, and in 1980 it published a booklet entitled "The screening of hearing impaired children" setting out the problem and suggesting guidelines for improvement.

Later research, particularly a paper on the subject in the *British Medical Journal* in 1982 entitled "Auditory screening of schoolchildren—Fact or Fallacy" suggested that in one area the

"school health service programme of auditory screening was ineffective and unreliable."

I know that there is some debate about that study because of the small sample involved, but the research emphasises the need for national screening and that the results should be published.

I emphasise that the point of this Adjournment debate is to put high on the public agenda the need for parental awareness of the importance of the early diagnosis of deaf children. We are in no way trying to minimise the hard work and effort of the health visitors and the majority of local authorities who do all that they can to discover deafness at an early stage.

It is easy, as we have witnessed in many policy areas, particularly in the past decade, where a problem is defined and responsibility for the implementation of that policy is given—in this case to a regional health authority—for the adequate funds to perform that task not to be provided. The responsibility is delegated, but the funds needed to do the task properly are not available. Therefore, the attempt to achieve adequate diagnosis is left to a later stage.

I make it clear that I make no criticism of health visitors or, for the main part, of the regional health authorities. I have raised the subject on the Adjournment at the wish of a family in Redcar, in my constituency. In that, there is no criticism of Cleveland county council, which has one of the best records in the United Kingdom for educational facilities for disadvantaged groups.

What primarily concerns me is that much of the research that I have read and my own experience with my constituents is that there are many problems relating to individual children which cannot be ignored. Despite the hard work carried out by many individuals, it is still clear that all is not well and that many hearing-impaired children are being diagnosed far later than they could be. The National Deaf Children's Society, as the only national charity specially concerned with deaf children and their families, knows better than anyone the extent of the problem. It warns of the far higher incidence of hearing loss in children than we are aware of which remains undetected and untreated. Figures are difficult to come by, but, based on the survey research available, a conservative estimate of more than 500,000 children is not unreasonable.

As I am sure the Minister is aware, the main cause of the hearing problems is glue ear. The condition is thought to be caused by a malfunction of the Eustachian tubes which results in a build-up of fluid in the middle ear. In many children, the condition resolves itself, but if it is prolonged it can cause serious learning difficulties. About one in three children has glue ear, which is the equivalent of saying that for one in three children listening is experienced as if they have their head in a bucket of water. That is the impact of having glue ear. What concerns me is that late diagnosis means that those children are handicapped in terms of their learning ability and they work at a disadvantage that will put them back as their learning experience goes on in school. That concern makes early diagnosis essential.

The existence of a hearing problem should not, if awareness is high enough, be difficult for parents or teachers to detect. As we all know, if children have a hearing problem, they may appear listless, they may be inattentive in class, they may seem to be disobedient or wilfully misunderstand and their behaviour and responses may be erratic. Speech difficulties are another good indicator, as are reading problems, especially those associated with phonetics. General learning difficulties can arise from prolonged hearing loss.

Asking for this Adjournment debate was the result of the hard work and persistent campaigning of one of my constituents in Redcar, Kathy Robinson. It is difficult to pay tribute to her work and she would not like it. She has worked hard for many years to publicise the plight of deaf children. She has especially campaigned for simple and straightforward improvements in the diagnosis of deafness among young children. I know from talking to her how frustrated she gets because what she asks for is so minor. However, in some senses, that is only one of the many frustrations that she has gone through in her life. The first frustration was the late diagnosis of Sarah, her first child, as deaf, followed 18 months later by the late diagnosis of her second child, Joanne. The learning difficulties compounded by late diagnosis are all too apparent to

[Ms. Marjorie Mowlam]

anyone who stops to think. The fact that months of learning have been stopped by people not being aware that the children were deaf has caused much frustration to Kathy Robinson and her husband Mick, and to other parents.

The best way to put the matter is in Kathy Robinson's own words. She says:

"Sarah was diagnosed as deaf at 2½. She was almost 3 before she knew she had a name or that people had names. She was a nobody in a world of other nobodies. In time she began to recognise that the sounds she heard, Eh-Ah, meant her, Sarah. It was a long time to wait three years. And what was it like for her all that time, and afterwards as well—when she couldn't say she had a pain in her tummy because she didn't know it was a pain or that she had a tummy? Once she was smacked for not coming when she was called. Why didn't they know she couldn't hear? Because she was bright and alert —and her record said hearing normal."

We must think not only of the frustrations experienced by parents but of that felt by the deaf children themselves. The Robinson family got through those early days, tough and traumatic though they were, by persuading one of the local schools, Sacred Heart—thanks to Cleveland health authority—to accept Joanne and Sarah as pupils. That meant that they were part of the community from an early age.

Kathy Robinson has also worked hard to publicise the plight of deaf children. Her book "Children of Silence" was published by Penguin. She says that it took her seven years to write, along with 16 rejections, but she was determined that others should know about the world of childhood deafness. The family's struggles were portrayed very well on the television last night.

The family have not given up, although Joanne and Sarah are now moving on to higher education and, in a sense, beginning to grow apart from them. Kathy is now campaigning to raise £9,700 to introduce a deaf tutor into a hearing school for five to seven-year-olds. She is also becoming something of a campaigner on behalf of sign language. I am sure that she will persuade me to take it up soon: I learnt the basics as a girl guide, and I think that the pressure is now on for us to learn much more than that.

Yes, children's hearing is tested when they are approximately eight months old; yes, it is tested again when they are at primary school. But the years lost in between are years in which a deaf child, through late diagnosis, may lose many years of educational advantage in the future. The voluntary sector is doing an excellent job in trying to make the public aware of the issues: The National Deaf Children's Society now provides postcards and offers a good deal of information, as does the General Practitioners Council for the benefit of doctors. Individuals such as Kathy Robinson and her family continue to campaign. Now, however, it is time for the Government to take some responsibility and to provide a greater chance of early diagnosis of deafness in young children.

We have two simple requests. First, we want a national policy, recognised in law, that would provide a standardised approach to screening. Records of screening should be available at national level, the results being monitored and published annually to show the percentage of children tested, referred for diagnostic assessment and shown to have a hearing loss needing medical and/or educational treatment. That would give us the picture nationally: it would show us what is being done, and would allow us to compare one authority or area with another.

Secondly, we ask for the introduction of compulsory training for all GPs who undertake screening as part of child surveillance. As we all know, GPs work very hard, often under considerable strain, and the combination of work load and time constraints means that they do not always have the chance to listen to patients' worries, as they would like. We therefore ask for the option of standard procedures for referral or open referral for patients. The need for patients to self-refer, or have additional referral, is very great: tragically, 41 per cent. of deaf children pass their first hearing tests. That is what worries parents such as the Robinsons so much.

I have cited the Robinsons as an example of families who fight and conquer the problems of deafness. Now Sarah and Joanne are making their own way in the world, despite the handicap that no one can see. In a sense, that will become marginalised if the basic principles and approaches to the condition do not change. The changes that I have outlined are simple, the costs would be minimal, and the result of a correct early diagnosis of deafness is so crucial to a child's later ability to learn and participate in society that I hope that the Government will consider implementing my proposals.

11.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) follows her predecessor as Member of Parliament for Redcar in raising this matter on the Adjournment of the House. I think that Mr. Tinn raised it on three separate occasions. Members of Parliament for Redcar traditionally draw attention to a matter that undoubtedly should be an important national health service priority, in terms of its responsibility for child health.

Earlier today I heard about the experience of a grandmother whose grandchild had suffered a hearing loss that had not been diagnosed as quickly as it ought to have been, with the result that the child's mother thought that her child was, in her own words, being defiant and that she would have difficulty in handling the child. The fact was, however, that the child's hearing difficulty had not been diagnosed soon enough for the parents and those outside the immediate family to take remedial action. The hon. Lady was right to stress the importance of ensuring that there is effective screening for deafness in young children at the earliest possible time. That commitment is not disputed. We entirely endorse the hon. Lady's commitment to that objective and we have taken steps towards achieving it.

I hope that I shall not appear to be complacent if I refer to measures that we have taken, but that is not to suggest that everything that should be done has already been done. Further action can be taken in order to achieve that objective, but the earliest possible diagnosis of deafness in children is a shared objective. Allowance must be made for it and treatment must be offered that results in the child suffering no long-term effects. Delayed diagnosis can result in long-term damage to a child's hearing. There is a definite clinical reason for early diagnosis. The commitment, I repeat, is clear and is not in dispute.

It is legitimate for me to draw attention to an element that we have included in the new general practitioner contract that has been in operation for 15 months. We took steps to extend the involvement of GPs in child health surveillance, in the belief that, through their regular contacts with the parents, they are particularly well placed to pick up concern about children's health. The new contract, introduced in April 1990, provides for a special payment to be made to eligible GPs to undertake child health surveillance work, in collaboration with health visitors. Eligibility is determined by training and by the experience of the GP in child health. That answers, at least in part, one of the hon. Lady's points.

The involvement of GPs in child health surveillance does not come just like that; GPs have to demonstrate competence before they are eligible for the specific payment for child health surveillance work. Therefore, it is a reflection of a GP's competence in child health surveillance. The new arrangements have led to the development of additional training opportunities for GPs to meet precisely the point that the hon. Lady has rightly identified.

So far, some 70 per cent. of GPs within the NHS have been accepted as eligible to undertake child health surveillance because they have demonstrated the necessary competence. To become accredited, many of those doctors will have undertaken updating training, including training in screening for hearing impairments. As a result, many families will now have a choice between the child health clinic and their GP when arranging child health surveillance. Some may find the clinic more convenient, but others may prefer the continuity and familiarity that comes with the established contact between the family and its general practitioner. That is one thing that we have done which demonstrates our commitment to efficient screening.

Another important idea, which perhaps goes some way to meet the hon. Member for Redcar's proper concern to ensure that the issue is constantly to the fore in not only the child's early years and at school but in the interim years, is the development of parent-held child health records. In that way, if the family or the child are seeing health professionals, there is a better chance that the complete health record and the results of every visit to a surveillance clinic or health professional are available.

Record keeping is a vital part of child health surveillance. Often, physical or sensory impairments are revealed only through close monitoring of the child's development over a period of time. However, surveillance programmes are vulnerable to interruptions due to missed appointments or the family moving from one district to another and the records not moving as fast as the family. To underline the importance of records and, equally importantly, to involve the parents in the surveillance work and the preparation of records, there have been a number of local initiatives to introduce parent-held child health records. Recently, a working party led by the British Paediatric Association reviewed the local initiatives and produced a model personal child health record. The record requires the parents to record key events in the child's development—for example, when the child says its first understandable word—and any concerns that they may have about the child's health. The record also contains health promotion advice on subjects such as feeding, immunisation and accident prevention.

The house visitor or doctor uses the record as a background to their examination of the child and enters the results of any tests they undertake as well as general observations about the child's development. The research shows that parents and health professionals welcome the use of those records and that they contribute to better co-operation and understanding of the diagnosis of various childhood disabilities. It uses the fact that parents have far more intense exposure to the child and may be aware of problems that they cannot link to a correct clinical diagnosis. However, those incidents can be entered into the child's record so that the health professional can make the necessary linkages.

It is also important to recognise that early diagnosis of deafness is not necessarily as easy as it might sound. It is not simply a matter of attending a clinic and seeing whether the child responds to a particular noise or test. Hearing ability will not be the same from one day to another, particularly in the case of children suffering from glue ear, who, as the hon. Member for Redcar rightly said, make up the majority of children suffering from deafness. To some extent, it is a fluctuating condition. Therefore, parental involvement and surveillance over a long period should not be underestimated if we are to have an effective means of tackling the problem.

The hon. Member for Redcar also asked about the national commitment, which she said that we should write into law, to early diagnosis and giving practical effect to that and the collection of statistics. I recognise that on the collection of effective epidemiological information on a nationwide basis we have some way to go before we can produce figures with which we can all be happy and which record accurately and at the earliest possible moment the incidence of deafness in children. The purchaser obligation under the new management structures of the health service places on district managers the obligation that the hon. Lady sought to ensure that priorities are recognised and followed through.

One of the specific issues that must be addressed in all child surveillance work is the link between child surveillance teams in community health departments and in primary health care. I am prone to ask about the difference between community health and primary health. I have asked that question more often than I have received an answer that I found convincing. I am more convinced that it is a distinction without a difference. In future, one of the priorities of health service managers will be to ensure more effective delivery of the old aspiration of a seamless service between the primary health system, which is led by GPs, and the community system, which is the responsibility of the district health authority. By far the biggest difference between the systems is that they are run by two different bureaucracies.

Ms. Mowlam: As the witching hour comes, I seek a point of clarification from the Minister. He said that he sees some advantage in publishing screening statistics, although there is some way to go, and questioned the need for a statutory base. Would it be fair to say that he sees it as advantageous in the long run and that he would encourage the publication of such statistics, albeit on a regional basis and in a non-statutory way? Is there a willingness to see that in the public domain?

Mr. Dorrell: There is a willingness to find ways of presenting that information in a scientifically rigorous

[Mr. Dorrell]

manner. The problem is defining the information to be published and ensuring that it is published in a usable form. I strongly support the provision of sufficient scientifically robust information to allow those who are interested to compare the performances of different health districts so that it can be seen which are effective in delivering the objective that the hon. Lady and the Government share of an efficient early diagnosis system. Once we know which districts are efficient in delivering that objective, we shall be nearer to taking the necessary steps to ensure that the less efficient become more efficient. By raising the subject on the Adjournment, the hon. Lady has demonstrated that commitment and it is shared by the Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 12 July 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Horses and Ponies (Export)

9.35 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf on the residents of the Uxbridge parliamentary constituency. The petition sheweth

That concern about proposals from the European Commission to allow the export of horses for slaughter after 1992 be brought to the attention of Her Majesty's Government.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge her Majesty's Government to ensure that the European Commission's proposals for a new regulation covering the welfare of animals during transport permit the United Kingdom to retain minimum value controls, or similar arrangements, on the export of horses and ponies for slaughter, which are embodied in the 1981 Animal Health Act, and calls upon the Government to make sure that our partners in the European Community understand that the United Kingdom's view is based entirely on welfare concerns and not on economic arguments.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

9.36 am

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Mr. King: Indeed it is, Mr. Speaker. It is normal practice, is it not, that when an honourable colleague in this House is doing what one might call porridge, or has been detained at Her Majesty's pleasure, or for whatever reason, you make a statement to that effect? Has it been communicated to you that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) is in prison? If not, ought you not to send out a rescue party? I understand that he is spending time in prison.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that every hon. Member is subject to the law, but I have yet to receive a communication from the court.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would not it be in order for you to point out, just in case it crosses the minds of Conservative Members, that, according to the rules of the House, there is no question of disqualification of a Member who is sentenced to a custodial sentence of less than one year? The last time that that happened was with John Stonehouse. To my recollection, not one Conservative Member called for any action to be taken against any of the Ulster Unionist Members who also served periods in prison—seven of them, I think, for a period of seven days each—for their refusal to pay either the road fund licence or the TV licence, due to their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

For my part, for that of other hon. Members on this side of the House—though not universally, I accept—and also for my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), who is unable to speak for himself this morning, I would point out that if his action keeps one pensioner out of prison—one pensioner in Preston had a heart attack last month—it will be worth it.

Mr. Speaker: These are not matters for the House, but I can confirm that a sentence of less than a year does not involve expulsion.

The Environment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

[Relevant documents: The Second Report of the Environment Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 22 of Session 1988-89, on Toxic Waste and the Government's Reply, Cm. 679; the First Report, House of Commons Paper No. 170 of Session 1989-90, on Contaminated Land and the Government's Reply, Cm. 1161; the Fourth Report, House of Commons Paper No. 12 of Session 1989-90, on Pollution of Beaches and the Government's Reply, Cm. 1363; the First Report, House of Commons Paper No. 39 of Session 1990-91, on Environmental Issues in Northern Ireland and the Government's Reply, Cm. 1484; and the Sixth Report, House of Commons Paper No. 61 of Session 1990-91, on Indoor Pollution.]

9.38 am

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): I am delighted to have this opportunity to talk about the Government's environmental achievements in this country. The Conservatives have an unparallelled record for radical, environment-improving measures. Every single major piece of environmental legislation this century has been either enacted or initiated by a Conservative Administration.

Just as our economic policy is based on an aversion to wasting taxpayers' money, so our environmental record reflects the even stronger arguments against squandering the world's finite natural resources. Just as this Government have been eager to repay some of the debts accumulated over hundreds of years, so they have been anxious not to bequeath a burden of environmental debts to generations to come.

Our recent record has more more than lived up to past achievements. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 gave Britain the first system of integrated pollution control in Europe. It will control emissions to air, land and water. It is an approach which we in the United Kingdom have pioneered and it means that we have one of the most sophisticated pollution control systems in the world. We are now encouraging the European Community to follow our lead.

Last September we published our environment White Paper. We were the first British Government to publish a comprehensive policy on all aspects of our environment and we are one of the very few Governments anywhere to do so. It is not just words; as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said the other day, it is a foundation on which we are building.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Minister explain what happened in respect of the speeches that he made on the issue last year? He will recall coming to the Dispatch Box during our debates on the Environmental Protection Bill and repeatedly arguing that we had to have a fragmented service. Is it true that the Prime Minister read the hon. Gentleman's speeches, found them totally unconvincing and announced earlier this week that he was opting for an integrated approach rather than the fragmented approach for which the Minister pressed so firmly throughout last year?

Mr. Trippier: What absolute rubbish. If the hon. Gentleman were to take the time and trouble to study the *Hansard* record of the Standing Committee proceedings on the Environmental Protection Bill he would discover that, with regard to integrated pollution control, I must have mentioned at least a dozen times that I would seriously consider the possibility of an environment agency being set up. I recall that Labour Members on the Standing Committee were very keen that we should more widely separate the poacher and gamekeeper roles by setting up a regional council, presumably of councillors, to act as the regulatory watchdog to supervise waste disposal.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The Minister is proving that he did not listen to what Opposition Members said at that time. He should recall that we did not put forward any suggestion of that kind. All our proposals for an environmental protection executive have completely separated the policing powers from those making political decisions. That was the basis on which we have promoted the idea of an environmental protection executive. I hope that the Minister will explain, especially in view of what the Prime Minister said on Monday, why he and his colleagues in the Standing Committee on the Environmental Protection Bill voted against an environmental protection executive.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady did not listen to what I said a moment ago. I will repeat it, but more slowly. I said that on a number of occasions I drew attention to the fact that the Government were prepared to consider at some stage in the future the establishment of such an agency. Whether it was to be called an environmental protection agency, an environmental enhancement agency or whatever was a matter that we would decide in the future.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) is upset because we have gone further than any commitment that I made at that time. We have given the responsibility for waste regulation to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The Labour party has never advocated that. The Labour party would never take that responsibility out of the hands of local authorities or regional councils.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Minister will recall that I was not a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Environmental Protection Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) was a member of that Committee. However, I have read the Committee proceedings and I will be more generous than the hon. Members for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). I accept that, from the beginning of the debate on that Bill, the Government said that they would consider setting up an integrated environmental protection body. However, is not the reality that everyone else, including the Opposition parties on the Standing Committee and the advisory and informed bodies outside this place, were persuaded of that some years ago? Therefore, the lesson to be learnt is that the Government, whatever their record, which we will debate today, are always slow in reaching conclusions that others arrive at much more speedily.

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's earlier comments. I have never done this before, but I must take this opportunity to say that throughout the Standing Committee proceedings on the Environmental Protection Bill the Liberal party's contribution was extremely positive. Indeed, it was so positive that it nearly damaged the Government's case on occasion. I had to question whether what we were doing was absolutely right.

If the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) read the *Hansard* record of the Standing Committee's proceedings he will recall that I must have mentioned on at least half a dozen occasions that we were determined to develop and strengthen Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. I admitted to the Committee, as I admitted on the Floor of the House around the same time about a year ago, that we were under strength in HMIP. I genuinely did not believe that that was the time to introduce an environment agency.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): As everyone is leaping on to this particular bandwagon—who proposed it and who did not—may I suggest not on a party political basis, but on an all-party basis, that the first discussion about an environmental protection agency took place in the Select Committee on the Environment? The Opposition parties had not thought about establishing an environmental protection agency until the idea appeared in the preface of the toxic waste report which appeared in February 1989.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Hugh Rossi: No.

I remember discussing the matter with Labour Members on my Committee who had been with us on the previous inquiry—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): The environment is no laughing matter.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I wonder whether I might be allowed to continue with my intervention.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a Committee stage; it is a debate. The hon. Gentleman should intervene briefly and make his point.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I was intervening, but found myself disconcerted because a number of other interventions were taking place at the same time. It will take me longer to make my point if I am interrupted in that way.

The idea of an environmental agency first emerged during the consideration of river and estuary pollution. We recommended the setting up of a national regulatory body. That was the first time that any discussion of that kind had taken place and all the members of my Committee agreed to it. When we found subsequently that the National Rivers Authority's powers were limited to the regulation of water, yet extended to leisure, sea defences and the rest, we criticised that in our toxic waste report——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an admirable speech. However, it is rather long for an intervention.

Sir Hugh Rossi: If I catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, I will make a speech on that point later.

Mr. Trippier: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) for that constructive intervention. I first became aware of the idea as a result of the Select Committee's recommendation. Whether or not Opposition Members agree with me, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green will accept that we went further than the Select Committee's recommendations because of the essential difference which the Labour party has not addressed: the responsibility for waste regulation would go to HMIP. The Liberals may find that they can support that.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: So would we.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady is misleading the House with that intervention. She should think very carefully about what she has just said. All the Labour Members of the Standing Committee, most of whom were members of the Select Committee on the Environment, made it abundantly clear—particularly the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike)—that they wanted the establishment of a regional regulatory body which would fit in with the Labour party's madcap idea of scrapping county councils and putting regional councils in their place. If the hon. Lady wishes to intervene to deny that, I shall certainly allow her to do so. She cannot intervene, because she cannot deny it. It is a matter of record.

The White Paper contained 350 commitments, more than 100 of which are already being implemented, and it puts in place powerful machinery to maintain the pressure on all Government Departments to set and achieve clear environmental objectives. Around the anniversary of the White Paper, we shall publish an update detailing the significant progress that we are making. The White Paper trailed the idea of introducing the powerful body that we have just been talking about to be responsible for pollution across the board. This week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that that agency is, indeed, to be created, bringing together the pollution control functions of HMIP and the NRA, along with waste regulation responsibilities of local authorities. The improved integration that will result will mean more effective pollution control all round and, I suppose most significant of all, a one-stop shop for business men. A consultation document will be published later this year to seek views on how that agency should function.

We have heard through the press comments made by Labour Members that we are stealing their clothes. They are upset and thin-skinned about it. However, the hon. Member for Dewsbury would never convince me or the rest of the House that she was not very miffed that we have made such a dramatic announcement with regard to the changes in waste regulation. I am beginning to think that the Labour party has a secret manifesto pledge to be profligate and ineffective at every possible opportunity. Let us look at what are laughingly called its environmental policies. Labour Members want to renationalise the water industries, at a cost of about £4 billion—£4 billion which could be spent on improving water quality. Not only that, but nationalistation would put a stop to the £28 billion investment programme made possible by the Government's privatisation of water, the biggest-ever investment programme.

Privatisation was right. It has been a success. We now have the biggest-ever investment programme in water quality—£28 billion over 10 years, which is £5,000 for every minute, day in and day out, year in and year out for the next decade. Nationalised water boards could never have done that. What Government in their right mind would throw that away? I suggest that it would be the type of Government such as the previous Labour Administration who cut spending on water by a third.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need only to look to eastern Europe to see what socialism does to the environment?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Beyond the Berlin wall and behind the iron curtain, thousands upon thousands of people have totally rejected socialism, because they were searching for an improvement in their quality of life. They wish to see that improvement in the quality of life which they had not experienced since the war. My hon. Friend is right. If ever there was an indictment of socialism and of how over-regulation can bring about exactly the opposite effect of what is desired, that is it.

Unlike Labour, the Conservative Government are proud of our record. Our success stories extend into every aspect of environmental concern. We have started by putting our own house in order. We have appointed a "green" Minister in every Department who is responsible for considering the environmental implications of its policies, and have required them all to report each year on their success in meeting their environmental goals. Each Department also now has a Minister responsible for integrating energy efficiency into its policies and programmes; that work is co-ordinated by a group chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): The Minister claimed that the Government are proud of their record on environmental issues. If that is the case, why have the Government scheduled this important debate on a Friday? The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and I, members of the shadow Cabinet, are present. Why is no Cabinet Minister present? Why is it that the Secretary of State for the Environment cannot be bothered to be present?

Mr. Trippier: I am most impressed to see the hon. Gentleman in his place. It will add to the great confusion surrounding the division of responsibilities between the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury. I find it very confusing—I do not know whether my hon. Friends do also. Who is speaking on environmental or green issues? Is it the hon. Gentleman or the hon. Lady? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a very important engagement today. The hon. Gentleman is just being a silly, silly boy—very, very silly. I should have thought that he would have something else to do, or does he think that his hon. Friends are not competent enough to handle this debate?

On transport, we have implemented tough new measures to cut pollution. From November this year, all cars, whatever their size, will have a tuning and emissions test in their MOT test. By 1992, all new cars will have to be fitted with catalytic converters. That will cut noxious exhaust fumes by more than 70 per cent.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I am surprised to hear the Minister praising the British Government's record on car emissions. Only this week, in the Moses Room in the other place, representatives of the German automotive parts manufacturer, Bosch, said that British car emission standards are among the lowest in Europe. Were they not telling the truth?

Mrs. Ann Taylor: He is right.

Mr. Trippier: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman might like to argue about that later.

The hon. Gentleman really should know by now that legislation on that matter is now dealt with through the European Environment Council. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, on two occasions in the past year, Britain has taken the lead in two directives on vehicle emissions —one on vehicle emissions generally and the other on diesel emissions. That is a matter of record. It is not open to speculation or hypothesis; it is a fact.

Sir Hal Miller: I was at that meeting. The Robert Bosch Ltd. representatives were referring to the standards of the MOT test. The Minister was talking about the initiative taken by our Government in setting EEC standards. The Robert Bosch representatives said that there is still some uncertainty, leading up to the introduction of full EEC standards, whether the MOT test should initially be a two-gas or a four-gas test. I shall develop those remarks in my speech.

Mr. Trippier: I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend's speech if he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification. He will know, as the House knows, that sales of unleaded petrol have soared, thanks to successive green Budgets which have given us one of the largest tax differentials in the EC. Unleaded petrol now accounts for a huge percentage compared with five years ago. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has said on more than one occasion, we are continuing to develop new thinking in reconciling our transport policy with the environment.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): The Minister says that the proportion of unleaded petrol is a huge percentage of the market. Will he give us figures and compare them with Germany, Holland and other European countries? Is not it a fact of life that the proportion of unleaded petrol in Britain is still well below the European average?

Mr. Trippier: I do not believe that it is below the European average. It is about the European average. I shall certainly check that point. The hon. Gentleman cannot deny that it has been a substantial success.

Mr. Williams *indicated assent.*

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the proportion of unleaded petrol used in this country is above those in that majority of European countries? Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy and France are below our average.

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. We shall look again at the figures which, I am sure, will bear out what he has just said.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Although the figures show that there has been a dramatic increase in our use of unleaded fuel and that we are way ahead of some other European countries, is it not a fact that almost twice as many motorists could be using unleaded fuel? Might it not be a good idea to put stickers on four-star pumps, saying, "Half of you who are buying this four-star petrol could be saving yourselves more than 10p a gallon. Perhaps you should consider adjusting your car or using unleaded fuel if your car will take it"? Will my hon. Friend confirm,

however, that increased motoring involves environmental costs, one of which is the threat to Oxleas woods in my constituency, to which I imagine that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) will refer later?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend may have the opportunity to develop his latter argument later if he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. His first point raised an attractive proposal, which is certainly worth looking at. We need to continue to increase awareness of the importance of using more unleaded petrol.

In the countryside we have recently announced plans for a countryside protection scheme known as countryside stewardship. Under a pilot scheme developed by the Countryside Commission, £13 million has been earmarked to help landowners and farmers throughout England to protect and enhance traditional landscapes and wildlife habitats. In addition, we have already started planting a brand new 150 sq mile forest in the midlands. It will be the first national forest to be planted in England since Pitt the Younger became Prime Minister. I should like to say a few words at this point about the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Last week Sir Fred Holliday, the independent chairman of the JNCC, told me of his concerns about effects of the arrangements for nature conservation in Scotland under the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill on the special responsibilities of the JNCC. He suggested that Ministers looked for a successor for him, but then agreed to let that lie on the table until my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I had had a chance to consider with our colleagues in the Scottish and Welsh Offices the points that he had made. We are pursuing these issues urgently and intend to let Sir Fred have a considered statement of our views early next week. Sir Fred is a distinguished scientist and administrator and we greatly value his role in taking forward the new arrangements for nature conservation in Britain made as a result of the recent legislation.

In the Government's view, the decision of Parliament to create an expert advisory committee to give Scottish Natural Heritage advice on disputed cases in no way undermines the role of the JNCC in establishing and upholding United Kingdom-wide standards for the protection of sites of special scientific interest. We would expect the chairman of the JNCC to notify Ministers if the operation of the new Scottish arrangements or, indeed, the conduct of the other two country councils was leading to different scientific standards being applied from those laid down by the JNCC.

In the streets in our towns and cities, we have taken action to arrest the problem of litter—something which affects the quality of people's environment every day.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Before the hon. Gentleman returns to the urban scene from the natural environment and from a consideration of sites of special scientific interest, could he be more forthcoming about a site of special interest in an urban area? I refer to Oxleas woods, to which his hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) has referred. How can the Minister claim concern for sites of special scientific interest in Scotland or anywhere else or for our common heritage of woodland when the Secretary of State has refused to accept the recommendation of the roads inspector for the east crossroute south of the Thames, thus destroying Oxleas woods in Greater London? Does not that make all the Government's claims about being green and being the protectors of our heritage absolutely worthless?

Mr. Trippier: Before the hon. Gentleman gets carried away, this is the opportunity to remind him who introduced the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It was my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I ask him also, who invented the term "sites of special scientific interest"? The Labour party never did anything on this issue. We established the sites of special interest, and a considerable number of sites have been so designated——

Mr. Spearing: The Government are now destroying them.

Mr. Trippier: I ask the hon. Gentleman to think carefully about what he is saying. If one turned a site of special scientific interest into a completely sanitised area, giving it absolute protection, compensation would have to be awarded in some form or other, principally through the courts. The designation of a site of special scientific interest is no more or less than a material planning consideration which has to be taken into account by the planning authority. I have always defended that position and I ask the hon. Gentleman to join me in that, because it would be disastrous to go down any other route——

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Peter Bottomley *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: I give way to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey.

Mr. Hughes: I shall allow the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) to intervene first.

Mr. Bottomley *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I call Mr. Simon Hughes.

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that I had the consent of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to intervene in the Minister's speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister clearly said that he was giving way to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not raise a point of order or anything else when I am on my feet. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr. Bottomley: I am not on my feet now, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was obviously at the starting gate. There have been quite a few interventions, some of which have been over-long, but they have all been at the expense of those hon. Members who wish to speak later. May we now get on? I call Mr. Simon Hughes.

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There have been some references to Oxleas woods in my constituency. As I have said, I believe that I

[Mr. Bottomley]

have the consent of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey to intervene at this point in the Minister's speech. If I am wrong——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We do not have interventions on interventions. Perhaps we should get on. I call Mr. Simon Hughes.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that the hon. Member for Eltham will get his chance later.

I had wanted to ask the Minister a simple question that relates to a similar case. Can he confirm that the Government have received a letter from the European Commission suggesting that the Government may be in breach of European Community directives in connection with the proposed M3 bypass around Winchester? That is another example of road building appearing to trespass against environmental considerations, SSSIs and the rest. It would be helpful if we could have confirmation that that letter has been received and that the Government are considering it.

Mr. Trippier: I am not aware that it has been received, but if I have the permission of the House and am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to reply to the debate, I undertake to come back to the hon. Gentleman on that point.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I think that my hon. Friend will discover that, in the case of Oxleas woods, there has been an inquiry by the European Commission to which the Department of Transport has responded. It might be useful to know whether there has been a further inquiry.

I should like to follow the point raised by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), which I wrongly anticipated that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) would mention. The Departments of the Environment and of Transport are considering the inspector's report on the modifications to the bridge proposals for the east London river crossing. Although there may be reasons for avoiding a judicial review and for the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment not meeting further delegations while they are considering the report, may I ask in public that if the road does eventually have to run through Oxleas woods—although that is opposed by most people because it does not benefit either the woods or the local people —the Government will give serious reconsideration to the inspector's recommendation in the previous inquiry that the road should be covered over, even it that means dropping the slip roads at Shooters Hill?

Mr. Trippier: Yes, I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurance that I shall draw what he has said to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

You were kind enough to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have taken several interventions. Perhaps I should now press on a little. I want to turn to a subject of great embarrassment to the Labour party. In the streets of our towns and cities, we have taken action to arrest the problem of litter, which affects the quality of people's environment every day. We have more than doubled the top fine for litter louts from £400 to £1,000. We want to ensure that councils fulfil their duties and clear the streets. That is why we have empowered local people to take their councils to court if they do not keep their streets clean. We know which councils they will be. It will be the high-spending, socialist councils, which seem more interested in nuclear-free zones than litter-free zones.

Just look at Liverpool—an inept and inefficient Labour council. When Labour came to power in Liverpool in 1983 the city stood on the edge of a precipice, since when it has taken a giant step forward. The ex-leader of Liverpool council admitted just how inefficient it was. He said: "it costs four times as much to pick up a piece of litter in Liverpool as it does in other areas"

Now, local residents have had to suffer a strike. As a result, the streets were not cleaned for weeks and the children were forced to play among the rubbish. That is a disgrace. Labour could not even empty the bins. Yet it has the nerve to say that it can run our country.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend reflect on what has happened in Liverpool? Will he reflect that Conservative legislation on competitive tendering will clean up the streets of Liverpool and that the Labour-controlled city council is using Conservative legislation which is opposed by the Labour party?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend's intervention must make the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen incredibly embarrassed. It is a matter of record that they attacked that legislation when it was going through Parliament, yet now they are glad of the opportunity to use it.

Recycling rubbish obviously makes sense. It reduces the need for landfill sites and saves on energy. British industry already has a reasonable record on recycling and it will become an increasingly attractive and necessary option. As higher standards are introduced and consumer pressure mounts, it will clearly be in the financial self-interest of companies to minimise waste.

Households, on the other hand, currently recycle 6 per cent. of recyclable household waste. This is not good enough, so the Government have set a clear target: their aim is that half of all recyclable household rubbish should be recycled by the end of the century. To help achieve that goal the Government are introducing a system of recycling credits, details of which were announced by my right hon. Friend on 1 July. That scheme will give waste collectors a financial incentive to promote recycling of household waste, by making it the duty of waste disposal authorities to give credits to collection authorities for waste that is diverted from landfill disposal as a result of recycling.

Opposition Members are also quite keen on recycling. They like nothing better than to recycle outdated, lacklustre and ineffective policies. Their policies are not just ineffective but, in many cases, positively damaging.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Trippier: No, not for the moment.

The Opposition plan to phase out nuclear power, which currently provides one fifth of our electricity, in favour of coal-fired generation, despite the fact that coal burning emits pollutants which contribute to acid rain and ozone depletion. That tells me that the Labour party is more committed to a cosy relationship with the trade unions than to the environment.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his Shell lecture, we believe that, far from being a constraint on business, high environmental standards are

a stimulus to develop the goods and services that will compete effectively in the increasingly international markets of the future. It is the Government's task to set and enforce those standards. However, state regulation is far from being the only answer. I remind the House of how state regulation worked in central and eastern Europe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) said earlier. The market can and must play an important part in meeting standards. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly recognised that the principal task of delivering sustainable development will fall to business. The Government can help the markets to work better partly through taxation and financial penalties, such as the petrol and recycling credit examples that I have given today, and partly through mobilising consumer choice. The emergence of the green consumer as a powerful economic force is one of the most hopeful environmental developments of the past decade, but in order that consumers can make those choices effectively they need accurate information.

That is why we must have honesty. There have been too many examples of misleading green claims which go only as deep as the label on the product. That is why Britain has been pressing hard for early agreement on a system of Europeanwide environmental labelling, which would enforce consistent standards. If agreement cannot be reached by the end of the year, the Government will introduce their own system.

Some particularly serious concerns have been brought to our attention in the past couple of years. One of these was the contamination of land, which was brought to our attention by the Select Committee. In response to the comprehensive Select Committee report, the Government identified three key areas for further action: first, information on the extent and location of contaminated sites; secondly, assessment criteria for the risks posed by the contamination found there, including the water environment; thirdly, technology and funding for clean-up. Progress has been made on all of those areas, as I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green will concede. Mechanisms for the prevention of future contamination have been strengthened in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 through the provision of integrated pollution control.

Another issue raised by the Environment Select Committee was indoor air pollution, including sick-building syndrome, tobacco smoke and radon. The Government are carefully considering the Select Committee's recently published report on this and will be responding to the Committee in the usual way, and as positively as possible.

Pollution of beaches has also been reported on by the Committee. It found that the risks of serious infection from sea bathing were minimal. Several recommendations were made, however, virtually all of which have been accepted by the Government. Indeed, the Committee's main conclusion about the need for sewage to be treated before being discharged into the sea had become Government policy before the Committee reported. The Committee welcomed our response, saying that there was clearly a considerable measure of agreement between the Government, the NRA and itself as to the way forward in bringing beaches up to a proper standard.

Back in February 1989 the Select Committee issued a report on toxic waste. It was a wide-ranging report which included the whole issue of waste regulation and disposal. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, the Committee recommended the separation of waste regulation from local authority waste disposal. I have already dealt with that.

We have also closed loopholes on the regulation of waste management and included a duty of care on waste holders in the Environmental Protection Act 1990—both Committee recommendations. In this debate we are asked to consider the Select Committee's report on Northern Ireland containing 29 recommendations, of which 24 are already being met or have been accepted.

This debate focuses on the United Kingdom environment, but many of the environmental issues that affect us cannot be addressed by the United Kingdom alone. In Europe we led the way on negotiating a nitrate directive designed to protect water from nitrate pollution from agricultural sources. The directive strikes a fair balance between improving water quality and maintaining an efficient agriculture. An estimated 2 million hectares might be designated as nitrate-vulnerable zones under this directive. Farmers within vulnerable zones will be subject to compulsory restrictions based on good agricultural practice.

The United Kingdom must recognise that there are plenty of issues that simply cannot be addressed by the United Kingdom Government alone. There are planetary issues which threaten our very existence. Global warming, ozone depletion and acid rain are problems which we must tackle and are tackling on an international scale. There is no point in Britain cutting back its carbon dioxide emissions if other countries carry on increasing theirs. As we all understand only too well since the nuclear accident at Chernobyl underlined the message, the environment of the United Kingdom cannot be protected simply by working in our national territory. The great global issues which will be debated by the G7 leaders here in London next week at which they will discuss the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development meeting next year in Brazil and other matters of national and international importance which affect the environment.

The Government's efforts have been unstinting on UNCED and the preparations leading up to it. We have taken an international lead in the efforts to halt the depletion of the ozone layer. It was a British scientist who played a key role in identifying the true scale of the problem. It was Britain which hosted two rounds of successful talks in London in the past two years that formed the basis for the current agreement to phase out CFCs by the year 2000.

On climate change, we have already set ourselves a demanding target and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said this week, if we can improve on that target, we will. In due course I shall be interested to listen to the Leader of the Opposition when he finally finds his tongue on the environment. I should like him to explain to his trade union colleagues exactly how the Labour party will cut carbon dioxide emissions.

We are already taking a leading part in the international negotiation on agreements to preserve tropical rain forests, maintain biodiversity and develop a charter on environmental rights and obligations.

The task of protecting, maintaining and enhancing the quality of the United Kingdom's environment is one of the central tasks facing the Government. That task must be

[Mr. Trippier]

carried out at every level from the street corner to the stratosphere. It is a task which the Government are carrying out with determination and vision.

10.20 am

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I think that most of us were expecting more from the Minister. We hoped that he would make some announcements. In the past year we have heard little from the Government about environmental protection and one speech from the Prime Minister does not make up for that year of inaction.

I am glad that we are having this debate today, not least because we have waited so long for it. Last year, when the Government published their White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", they promised that we would have a debate on the subject soon after. It has taken us 10 months to get that debate, but I suppose that we should be grateful and say that it is better late than never. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) pointed out, the fact that the debate is taking place on a Friday, when most of our colleagues must be in their constituencies, demonstrates that the Government do not regard environmental protection as a particularly high priority.

I am glad that the Minister of State is with us today, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said, I am sorry that the Secretary of State did not believe that the debate was of sufficient importance to make it his priority to attend.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Lady has referred to this debate taking place on a Friday; perhaps she would like to tell the House when the Opposition last used one of their days to debate the environment.

Mrs. Taylor: We had a debate that included a discussion of the water environment about two weeks ago.

Today, the Minister gave us his usual mixture of complacency, arrogance and rhetoric. Those involved in environmental protection do not find that a reassuring combination. He claimed that much progress has been made in the past year, but we should consider those problems that are becoming more severe, which cover a range of issues with which the Minister did not deal adequately.

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Lady is going to continue in this vein, perhaps she will answer a simple question. Why was it that when the Labour Government were last in power they actually cut by one third their contribution to the water authorities?

Mrs. Taylor: Those matters have been bandied across the table many times, but let me remind the Minister of the figures. During the period of the Labour Government from 1974 to 1979, the average investment in the water industry was £1,254 million a year. The average investment under the Conservative Government between 1979 and the time of privatisation was £922 million a year. That illustrates the significant difference between the levels of investment. Many people believe that that difference was deliberately manufactured because the Government wanted it to appear that privatisation would be successful. If the Minister had spent as much time helping those in the water industry as he has helping the chairmen and shareholders by subsidising the sale of that industry, the water environment would be in a much healthier state today.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has already made one long intervention. I have already given way twice and I want to make progress.

I want to suggest to the Minister some of the items that he should have addressed today—I can understand why Conservative Members do not want me to pursue that. In the past year, a number of significant environmental problems have worsened and we should address them.

Energy consumption has increased despite the fact that the gross domestic product has been decreasing. Ministers have pressed ahead with the road building programme regardless of its impact on sites of special scientific interest. Emissions of CO_2 have increased. We are losing hedgerows at a rate of 4,000 miles a year. In the past year, more than 800 sewage treatment plants have enjoyed immunity from prosecution, despite failing their consents. We must set this debate in its right context. Environmental problems are intensifying and the Minister's self-satisfied complacency is extremely dangerous.

The Minister did not say much about the White Paper "This Common Inheritance", but I am not surprised, given the response to it from the vast majority of environmentalists and the press. The Minister's claims of progress are weak and they do not add up to an environmental protection strategy. They do not suggest that his Department colleagues or senior colleagues at Cabinet level in other Departments are embracing environmental considerations when determining their policies and priorities.

A report entitled "Institutions and Sustainable Development" has been published by the global environment research centre at Imperial college in conjunction with the United Nations Association. That report was sponsored and paid for by the Department of the Environment. It is significant that on the Government's policy of integration the report states:

"it is hard to find evidence that this is happening to any significant extent . . . Nor could we find any convincing evidence inside departments that giving Ministers or individual officials specific 'green' responsibilities had made any real difference to their perceptions or policies."

That criticism has been frequently levelled by environmental groups and the Minister should take it as a salutary warning. People are studying the policy and are not simply heeding the rhetoric that comes from Ministers.

The Minister briefly mentioned the global environment and climate change. "This Common Inheritance" said that global warming is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world—no one can doubt that. The White Paper gives a fair analysis of the problem, but politicians should be judged not simply on their analysis of a problem, but on their commitment to action to solve or combat that problem.

It is important that we consider in detail what the Government have done in the past year on that vital issue. After all, we have had plenty of time to assess the Government's attitude because it is so long since the statement on the White Paper. I am sure that Ministers would agree that they have no excuse for inaction, as we have been given a proper assessment of the severity of the

problem. Ministers know what needs to be done to tackle it and they have the political power to introduce any programme that might be necessary.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I came here thinking that we would be debating the United Kingdom environment, and there are five reports from the Select Committee to debate. The report on tropical forests is not before us; nor is the subject of international global warming. Do you agree that we should debate the subject in question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The motion is that the House do now adjourn. I have not heard anything from the hon. Lady that has been out of order.

Mrs. Taylor: Either the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) does not agree with the Minister, who raised the issue, or does not understand the problems that exist. It is incredible that some Conservative Members clearly believe that we can opt out of the problem of global environment. All the problems on that front affect all of us, and the Minister acknowledged that the Government have a role to play in tackling them.

We now know the intensity of the problems of climate change and we know that some steps that must be taken quickly. The question is whether there is the political will to tackle the problems in the right way. I must, therefore, examine the issue of climate change, despite the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh, and the stance that the British Government have taken in the negotiations for a framework convention on climate change. Such a convention is the main hope for international agreement for action on a scale adequate to deal with the matter.

The British Government have put forward several papers on the subject. The original document was known as paper No. 9, though I gather that the Minister argues that the intention was to reflect existing consensus rather than to establish new tactics. The Government then tabled a paper entitled "The Draft United Kingdom Paper on Possible Elements for Inclusion in a Framework Convention on Climate Change." That took us little further forward and I was disappointed with the suggestions made in it, because the Government do not appear to be taking the matter seriously enough.

Mr. Trippier: On reflection, the hon. Lady may wish to apologise to me and the House, because she is clearly not aware that 120, possibly more, countries will be discussing the matter at Rio in June of next year and we have immense pride in the fact that the British text has been selected for negotiation in the first instance. What on earth is the hon. Lady talking about?

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister's proposal of a low starting point in the discussion has let many other Governments off the hook, and that is the real difficulty which the British Government have created. To show how the latest document reveals a lack of seriousness on the part of the Government, it says, for example:

"In formulating these strategies, developed countries should agree to take as a guideline that the stabilisation of greenhouse gas emissions should be achieved by them as soon as possible."

How can progress be made with such meaningless statements? What has happened to the precautionary principle on which I thought it was accepted we should now make progress?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady is on a weak point. The British Government have been praised by all the member states in Europe——

Mrs. Taylor: That is not so.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady is not in a position to say that. When I attended the last meeting of UNCED in Nairobi a few weeks ago the paper that was introduced ——she is right to say that it represented only the beginning of negotiations——

Mrs. Taylor: I gave way to the Minister. What is his point?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady should stop being so unpatriotic. She should not drag the country down. The Labour party delights in dragging the country down and selling it short, and nobody enjoys it more than the hon. Lady.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the Minister is not dragging me into it, too.

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister enjoys winding himself up on these matters. He presents papers and makes statements abroad as though nobody in Britain will check on what he has done. The Government are selling the country short. They are refusing to set the right target and stiff timetable that are needed to benefit everyone, in Britain and the rest of the world.

Mr. Trippier: What is Labour's target?

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Yes, we want to know.

Mrs. Taylor: If Conservative Members are keen to have that information, I will give it to them. The Minister is arguing as though the Labour party had never published a target. We have said clearly that we want to achieve the sort of target that most other European countries want, and that is stabilisation of CO_2 emissions by the year 2000. It is incumbent on the Minister to explain why Britain must be in the second division on this issue and why we cannot meet the same targets as other EC countries.

Mr. Roger King: The hon. Lady has talked about working towards the year 2000 for the stabilisation and reduction of CO_2 emissions. Has she had the opportunity of checking that with her trade union friends, particularly Mr. Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers? Mr. Scargill envisages the expansion of the coal industry, which would mean fossil fuel being burned. The Labour party insists that nuclear energy shall be phased out and then eliminated. So presumably they are talking about more fossil fuel-powered stations based on coal, in which case the figures that the hon. Lady has given could not be met.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman exhibits total ignorance of the subject. I shall explain how our target would be achieved—*[Interruption.]*—and I assure Conservative Members that it remains Labour policy. It is also the policy of most other EC countries. The British Government are lagging behind, admitting by not doing as well as other countries that they deserve to be in the second division on this issue.

Mr. Trippier *rose*——

Mrs. Taylor: I shall give way to the Minister for the last time.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady cannot be allowed to get away with her last statement. Nobody inside or outside the House can believe what she is saying. The Labour party claims that it could stabilise CO_2 emissions by the year 2000, when it is already committed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) pointed out, to phasing out nuclear power, which makes a 20 per cent. contribution to our energy requirements, and replace that by coal. It would be physically impossible to achieve Labour's aims, because that phasing out would bring about an increase in CO_2 emissions. The hon. Lady is being totally misleading.

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister should study some of the research that has been done in this area. He is admitting, from his comments today, that he has not examined the issue in sufficient detail. Otherwise he would know that our policy statements and commitments about stabilising CO_2 emissions are realistic and achievable and predate the White Paper.

I appreciate why the Government are trying to wriggle out of making binding commitments on the international scene. What is the Minister's view of the United State's position, and why are the British Government almost helping America to get away from making binding and legal targets and commitments? Many issues must be raised—*[Interruption.]*—and it seems that the British Government are not taking a leading position in dealing with these issues——

Mr. Roger King: Oh dear.

Mrs. Taylor: —and that they do not recognise or want to make progress—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal to hon. Members to desist from making sedentary and audible comments, which impede the progress of debate. Other hon. Members are waiting to make speeches. I hope that we shall have better order than we appear to have at the moment.

Mrs. Taylor: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because the facts embarrass the Government, Conservative Members would prefer to have them shut out.

I urge the Government to be as candid about targets —and the Minister to be frank when giving his point of view—as the Labour party. Our commitment is clear. Will the Minister clarify further just what is the Government's commitment? The White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", says—the Prime Minister said it again on Monday—that the Government will accept a target for the stabilisation of CO_2 emissions by the year 2005 only if other countries do the same. Why does the document say, "only if other countries do the same"? What happens if other countries do not meet that obligation? For example, what happens if the United States lags behind? Does that mean that Britain should also lag behind? If the Minister wishes to intervene to clarify that point, I am happy to give way.

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to clarify that issue. We are already committed to it. As I said in my opening remarks, it would be silly nonsense if all countries did not abide by international agreements. Clearly, it would be nonsense if we alone were to do so. We want everyone else to act in the same way.

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister has still not answered the question.

Mr. Trippier: They are doing it.

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister is dodging the issue. He has not said what would happen if the United States or any other country lags behind. I should like the Minister to say that, regardless of whether other countries meet the target, this country must meet it, even though the target is inadequate by our standards. Why do the Minister of State and the Prime Minister always have the rider, "if other countries also meet the target"? Why cannot we have the clear commitment that the Labour party has made even on the date, which is not as good as ours?

We cannot opt out of the effects of global warming or our responsibilities to set and meet our own targets. I hope that when the Minister winds up he will explain his attitude on some other suggestions that are being put forward at the climate change convention. For example, I hope that he will tell us that he intends to reject the attitude of the Japanese, who simply say that everyone should do their best. I also hope that he will say that the targets should be confined to CO_2 emissions and that the burden should not be spread so that developing countries are faced with difficulties with which they cannot cope.

Mr. Roger King: The hon. Lady suggested that the Government are not taking a leading role in promoting conservation and reducing CO_2 emissions. Has she, perchance, seen today's issue of *The Times* in which there is an article entitled

"Heseltine attacks Sununu over gases"?

The Secretary of State has written an extremely strong letter to Mr. Sununu saying that he is no longer prepared to accept the lethargy of the United States in its resolve to tackle CO_2 emissions, for which the United States accounts for some 23 per cent. Therefore, the Government are taking a leading role even against our closest ally.

Mrs. Taylor: I do not wish to intrude into a possible conflict between the hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues. The hon. Gentleman refers to the United States as our closest ally, but some of his colleagues think that our European allies should fill that role. One letter does not excuse the fact that the Government have been covering for the United States at international conferences.

Conservative Members have asked how realistic our targets are and how they could be achieved. They should be well aware of the evidence on energy efficiency submitted to the Select Committee recently. This country's efforts with regard to energy efficiency are extremely poor. Friends of the Earth evidence shows that we could easily achieve our targets on CO_2 emissions simply by improving energy efficiency. It is a sad commentary on what has been happening to this country in recent years that there has been such a decline in areas such as double glazing and heating control, which could have done so much. Markets have declined, not least because of the Government's policies and approach.

It is no wonder that Sir Anthony Pilkington, whose group owns an insulation factory, has praised the Labour party and said:

"this country is suffering from a lack of Government policy on energy conservation."

We have suffered time and again from a lack of Government policies. We have seen their priorities, such as the privatisation of electricity. The Government's priority was not to consider the environment or press ahead with flue gas desulphurisation. Rather, it was to sell off, at great cost to the taxpayer, an industry which is now charging high prices, making large profits and paying top management scandalous and outrageous salaries.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: No, I must press on, because there will shortly be a statement and I have taken longer than I intended.

It is not only on climate change and energy efficiency that we have not made much progress in the past year. Pollution from vehicles is a major problem, with which the Government still refuse to deal. The problem of sites of special scientific interest was mentioned earlier. The Nature Conservancy Council estimates that 161 SSSIs are affected by the English road programme. The Royal Society for Nature Conservation has said that 372 areas of wildlife interest are affected; 30 National Trust sites are threatened and the M25 is threatening and will affect 37 ancient woodlands. Time and again we see that the Government's priority is not public or rail transport. Because of that, we are all suffering in environmental terms and from a lack of choice about the form of transport that we use.

Mr. Spearing: Is my hon. Friend aware that in paragraph 5·58 of the White Paper the Government agree that in London, rail transport for commuters is the most effective means? However, on the notorious east London river crossing, a six-lane motorway will be the main means by which commuters from north Kent will reach the notorious Canary wharf scheme, where 50,000 jobs are going. They will then go through Newham and add to the exhaust pollution there. Would not it be better to extend the docklands light railway over that bridge to provide the choice of which my hon. Friend speaks?

Mrs. Taylor: As ever, my hon. Friend has done his homework on that issue and has not only come up with an idea but knows the feasibility of the project. Therefore, as always, he has a strong case.

If we compare the priority that is given to rail transport in this country with that given elsewhere, we realise why our rail system is so appalling. It is starved of investment. Britain spends 0·12 per cent. of its gross domestic product on support for the railways. The European average is 0·7 per cent., which means that European countries spend on average six times as much supporting their rail service.

Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber mentioned Oxleas woods. I confirm to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that the EC has sent a formal letter to the British Government because of their failure to implement the environmental impact assessment directive, which includes the problems that have been created at Twyford Down, the east London river crossing and the Hackney M11 link road. The Government are not implementing the directive properly and the EC is about to intervene. If the Minister was monitoring properly what was happening, he should be aware of that fact.

The Minister referred to the following point in two lines and I understand why he did not want to say more. We have seen some remarkable developments in the past few weeks. First, the director of the National Rivers Authority, John Bowman, and then the recently appointed head of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's most senior conservation adviser in Great Britain, Sir Frederick Holliday, resigned. Sir Frederick resigned because of clear political difficulties that had undermined his position. The saga of the break-up of the Nature Conservancy Council was not a happy one, and the blow to the new structure was serious and should make Ministers understand that they will have to make choices. In this case, they will have to choose between the needs of conservationists and the wishes of the rich land owners, including some of those in another place. It was clear that some Ministers made their choice and, as Sir Frederick said, the implications of the issue go far beyond Scotland to affect nature conservation in Britain.

Sir Frederick Holliday is obviously not a man to resign lightly or without good reason. Clearly, he could not accept that the personal interests of a few Scottish landowners should take precedence over the needs of the environment. The way in which his committee has been bypassed in relation to those vital changes is extremely serious. The Minister said that he was pursuing the matter urgently and would let Sir Frederick have his views next week. From the Minister's comments on SSSIs generally, I do not think that very much that he can say will be reassuring.

During the debate on the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) said on 24 June, at column 817 of *Hansard*, that the Department of the Environment had been consulted. That makes the Department of the Environment party to the decision that was made. Is that true? If so, what did the Minister tell his Scottish colleagues? I am happy to give way if the Minister wishes to clarify the position.

Mr. Trippier: I was consulted.

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful for that clarification. Does that mean that the Department of the Environment has less clout than the Scottish Office? The Minister was overruled and I presume that the Secretary of State backed him up; does that mean that the Scottish Office has more clout than the Department of the Environment? It says little for the much-feted ministerial committee for co-ordinating environment policy. Where was the co-ordination of environment policy on that issue?

It is no wonder that the Council for the Protection of Rural England states:

"The promise of a significant shift in the attitude of the Government Departments has entirely failed to materialise."

The Minister must realise that it is not just other Departments that have reneged on pledges to care for the environment; the record of Ministers at the Department of the Environment is not so bright. Let us consider their policy and record on common land. The 1987 Conservative manifesto gave a clear, specific commitment that the Government would legislate to safeguard common land on the basis of the Common Land Forum. The Minister will be aware that there were questions throughout 1987, 1988 and 1989 on when that legislation would be introduced.

[Mrs. Taylor]

Almost a year ago, at the end of the parliamentary Session last July—I think that it was the day before the House rose for the summer recess—the Minister issued a statement, in reply to what appeared to be a planted question, saying that the Department was reneging on that promise and commitment in the manifesto, and nothing has happened since. All those involved in the Common Land Forum, apart from the landowners, were extremely distressed at what was happening but they tried to be accommodating and see what could be done. They offered to compromise and suggested to the Minister introducing a short Bill to protect existing common land. The Minister refused to do so. I think that when people vote in the next election and look at the environmental commitments in the Conservative manifesto, assuming that there are any, they should measure those promises against the record of what the Government have done in relation to a clear, simple, straightforward commitment given in the 1987 manifesto, on which they have taken no action.

We have proposed an environment protection executive. The Minister will recall that we moved amendments to try to incorporate such an executive and agency into the Environmental Protection Act 1990. As late as 30 January last year, the Minister and his colleagues voted against an independent environment protection executive, which was also ruled out on page 232 of the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", published last October. The Prime Minister said that there was to be a U-turn and the Government would issue a consultative document later in the year.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wish that, instead of talking about citizen charters and providing protection for the people, the Government would do something about the fear in my constituency about the level of dioxin in milk. Despite all their blather, the Government refuse to have a public inquiry into the case of two farms where the farmers have been deprived of their livelihoods because they are not allowed to milk their cows any more. There are 25 other sites where there are doubts about safety levels. The standards were changed at the end of 1990 by a factor of 10. If that had not been so, every farm in the district would have been included in the danger zone. The Government talk about a charter, but refuse to have a public inquiry to allay the fears of the people in Bolsover or pay compensation to the farmers. They are all talk and no action.

Mrs. Taylor: As my hon. Friend says, the Government are frequently all talk and no action. The case he has highlighted reflects the widespread concern of many people, especially parents, at the deteriorating standards and present contamination.

The Royal Society for Nature Conservation stated that the Government have been dragged kicking and screaming to the policies advocated by some for years. It describes the Prime Minister's speech as

"smacking of piggy bank politics."

We do not mind that; our backs are broad enough to stand it. We welcome the reversal and the fact that the Prime Minister made that speech.

Mr. Trippier: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: No, because there is to be a statement in a moment.

We are pleased that the Prime Minister made his statement on the same day that the Fabian Society document was released. The document went further than anything the Government have ever published and explains exactly how the environment protection executive would work in practice. It is easy for people to make a comparison between a Government who snatch at ideas when they run out of steam and the Labour party, which is preparing for government and knows how to implement its policies.

However, I am worried that there is to be a long period of consultation, and I hope that the Minister will deal with that issue in his wind-up speech. I am tempted to ask the Minister why we need another consultative document and more time. After all, Ministers are the very last people to be committed to the policy. Everyone else is clear and knows the direction in which they want to move. If the Minister wants there to be a consultative period, I make the offer that I will put in a word for him with the Fabians and the consultations can take place on the basis of that document.

My fear is that, yet again, we shall get too little, too late from the Government. Time and again, we have seen that the Government are not willing to take the actions that are required to give environmental proptection the priority that it deserves. The Government's attempt at integrating environmental policy with other Departments has been a sham and a failure. As was demonstrated by the Minister's speech this morning, the Government have run out of steam. They have no record on which they dare face the electorate. The sooner the election comes and we get a Labour Government committed to giving the right priority to environmental protection, the better. As soon as the election comes, we will be ready for government and we will implement the policies that we have already worked out.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Commonhold

11 am

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about commonhold and related matters. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is making a corresponding statement in another place.

Before making the statement, I wish to declare an interest. I have a lease on a flat in my constituency with some 990 years to run.

The Government have decided to introduce for England and Wales a scheme providing for the freehold ownership and communal management of flats and other interdependent buildings with shared facilities. This new scheme, called commonhold, was proposed in 1987 in a report of a working group of officials chaired by Mr. Trevor Aldridge, a law commissioner. After arranging in 1988 for draft legislation to be prepared at the Law Commission to give effect to these proposals, the Government issued a consultation document in November 1990 inviting comments on the draft legislation. The document also raised a number of issues of major principle relating to commonhold and leasehold enfranchisement. More than 1,000 replies were received, and the Government are grateful to all those who commented.

It is proposed that commonhold should be available for all types of land use—whether residential or commercial. Conversion of existing premises to the commonhold system will be optional, although it may be necessary to make provision to override the objections of a small minority of leaseholders.

In addition to providing for the freehold ownership of flats and other relevant properties, the scheme would establish standard democratic management arrangements, though with scope for variations, and that in turn would simplify conveyancing. There would also be a scheme for orderly winding up for use when, for example, the commonhold property is damaged beyond repair or has reached the end of its useful life.

The Government have also decided to give long leaseholders of residential flats collectively the right to buy from the freeholder, at market value, the freehold interest in their block. It is proposed that the right will apply to properties containing two or more flats held by qualifying long leaseholders if at least two thirds of the flats are held by qualifying long leaseholders and if not more than 10 per cent. of the internal floor space, excluding common parts, is used for non-residential purposes.

If at least two thirds of the qualifying long leaseholders vote in favour of purchasing the freehold and the number voting in favour comprises at least two thirds of all householders ordinarily residing in the block, the landlord will be obliged to offer the freehold for sale to them.

In conjunction with the commonhold proposals, the Government have decided to implement, with modifications, the main recommendations in the Law Commission's report on "Transfer of Land—The Law of Positive and Restrictive Covenants" Those recommendations are designed to produce satisfactory arrangements for the imposition on freehold land of positive and negative obligations which can be enforced against successors in title to the original owner of the land.

The changes will benefit at least 1·5 million leaseholders of flats. They underline our commitment to home ownership. They will greatly extend many people's freedom to take responsibility for their own affairs. I am confident that they will be widely welcomed. Legislation to implement the proposals will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time for it can be found.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): At long last we have a definition of the Prime Minister's philosophy: Majorism equals plagiarism. I am delighted that the Minister has accepted well over 50 per cent. of the recommendations that I put to the Aldridge committee, and published, some months ago. I am sorry that he could not have gone a little further. If the Government go on stealing our policies, they will be nicked for shoplifting at the next election. Nobody wants to buy a watered-down policy when he can buy the real thing from the Labour party.

I have several specific questions which follow from my statement on the issue many months ago. First, will there be a system of independent valuation to decide the price? Secondly, why not extend the right to buy to all leasehold properties in which there is an independent flat or house? There is little argument against that. The Minister's formula is very limited and the matter needs to be looked at more widely. We should want to extend the provision more widely to leaseholders.

Thirdly, and importantly, because many people will not be able to buy the lease, even as part of a group in some cases, will the Minister give a right to extend the lease? The people most badly hit at present are those who cannot afford to buy, who are near the end of the lease, and whose lease will transfer to an assured tenancy with a market rent. They will lose the capital value of the property when the lease terminates. The right to extend the lease would be much appreciated.

Fourthly, could we have the right to independent audit? I have had literally hundreds of letters about the issue over the months. One of the most important issues for leaseholders is that they feel that they are charged unreasonable fees for work that is often not done, or done badly. I suspect that many Conservative Members who have constituents who are leaseholders have had similar letters. May we give leaseholders the right to an independent audit?

Fifthly, may I ask for an extension of that right? There should be a right for leaseholders to have a say in choosing the new management agent. A freeholder may employ a managing agent who does not do the job properly or who charges unreasonably. Many Conservative Members will be familiar with that problem. The only way in which to deal with that problem is to empower the leaseholders by giving them the right to have the managing agents changed if they fail to do their job.

If the Minister gives me a definitive and positive answer to those questions, he will have taken all our policies and I will congratulate him wholeheartedly.

Sir George Young: I am grateful for the enthusiastic endorsement of my announcement. In response to the hon. Gentleman's first question, there will be provision for independent valuation when there is no agreement between the freeholder and the enfranchising leaseholders. I do not accept that the policy is restrictive. As I explained, it will apply to 1·5 million leaseholders, which seems quite a broad base.

We considered the question of extending leases. If one gave a right for a lease to be extended, it would cut across

[Sir George Young]

the basic thrust of our policy, which is to give leaseholders collectively the right to buy their freehold. One would then be confronted by the problem of leaseholders having a range of leases of different lengths. It is better to give them the right collectively to buy the freehold and then they can extend their own leases as long as they want. That is the best way to approach the matter.

The hon. Gentleman's final two questions referred to the existing regime. Of course I will consider again the way in which accounts are audited. All audits are meant to be independent of the person or organisation whose accounts are being audited. The hon. Gentleman referred to appointing managing agents. If leaseholders take the opportunities that the Government propose to make available to them, they will appoint the managing agents themselves.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): May I remind my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) that it was the Conservative party, then in opposition, which proposed that flats be enfranchised by amendment to the Leasehold Reform Act 1967? The then Government found it impossible to do that because it was too complicated. We returned to the subject between 1974 and 1979, and again the then Government found it impossible to do. I am delighted that, at the 11th hour when it has become practicable following the Law Commission report, the Labour party has been converted to the concept.

There have been reports that there will be no rateable value limit on the right that is to be exercised for flats, and that the provision may then be extended to houses, which cannot be enfranchised under the Leasehold Reform Act because of the rateable value limits that were imposed by the Government of the day but then amended following pressure from Conservative Members just before the 1979 election. There is still a limit.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House that radical proposals on housing stem from the Conservative party and not from Labour. He is right to say that the statement proposes no rateable value ceilings for enfranchisement of flats. That contrasts with the position for houses. The Government have no rooted objection to lifting the rateable value for houses. Parliament will have to take a view on that in debates on the Bill. No doubt we will respond to pressure if strong views are held on the matter.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the announcement. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said that the idea had emerged about 25 years ago. Why has an idea that was generally welcomed by the profession taken so long to convince the Government? Many people would have been grateful if the idea had been accepted much earlier. How will the proposals affect long leaseholders whose landlords are individuals, companies or, more importantly, charities where the freeholder is a voluntary body or the Church Commissioners? As the Minister will know, local authorities hold long leases and occupiers have been prevented from acquiring the freehold collectively or individually because of anomalies in Government legislation introduced in the past 10 years.

Sir George Young: The exemptions will be the Crown, following precedent, and charitable housing associations. There will not be an exemption for individuals or local authorities, providing the conditions that I outlined in my statement are adhered to.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): If you were free to speak, Mr. Speaker, you would remind the House that most of these ideas came from Sir Brandon Rhys Williams and have been pushed forward by his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn). This initiative and others on housing that appear often to have all-party agreement are an important approach to solving housing problems. Although rough justice may not make it possible to exclude the small number of people who have built houses or flats with their own hands for their families, have then let them, and have found that, against their will, enfranchisements have allowed the occupiers to buy them, such people deserve sympathy, even if they cannot be protected by legislation.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend rightly reminds the House of the campaigning zeal of Sir Brandon Rhys Williams and how it has been continued by his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for City and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). Many other London Members have also campaigned on the matter. An exception will apply where the landlord is a resident in a block of flats that are not purpose built. That is to say, he occupies a flat which is his only or principal residence in, perhaps, a terraced house that he has converted. In such conditions there will be no right to enfranchisement.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): A problem arises in London and other cities when some flats in a block are rented and others are owned under lease. When a landlord owns one third or more of the flats in the block, will the Government ensure that the remaining leaseholders in the block who own their properties will be able to enfranchise on commonhold? There is a danger that one leaseholder could prevent the development of a whole block.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman raises the problem that may arise in a block of flats in which a fairly large minority of renting tenants may not wish the block to change hands and be owned by their neighbours who are leaseholders. We propose that there should be a clear majority of enfranchising and qualifying leaseholders before a block changes hands so that such tenants can be protected. We can debate the percentage and how people should be protected, but I recognise the problem. There may be a substantial number of renting tenants, and one must try to safeguard their interests.

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): The statement on this ultimate leasehold reform will be greatly welcomed by Londoners and, indeed, by the 1·5 million people who live in leasehold flats. In the past 10 years leasehold law has fallen down and has caused widespread misery for people in flats. How soon will this lead to legislation on the matter?

Sir George Young: I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend. When I was allowed to say what I thought I was one of the sponsors of his ten-minute Bill. That Bill and his speech on its introduction were important elements in shaping the Government's approach to this subject. He rightly says that the present system has an inbuilt conflict of interest between freeholders and leaseholders. The advantage of what we propose is that that conflict would be removed by marrying the two sets of interests.

My hon. Friend asked about the timetable. As I said in the statement, we shall propose legislation as soon as parliamentary time can be found. The Government will listen to pressures in the House. The proposals seem to have all-party support and that will be relevant when considering the timetable.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Does the timing of the announcement mean that we are more likely to have a general election in the autumn rather than next spring?

I welcome the changes for which I have campaigned for many years. From practical experience of the workings of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, I know that there are immense financial and practical problems for a group of leaseholders trying to acquire the freehold of their block. What matters greatly to many leaseholders in London is the ability to extend their leases in the same way as the leaseholder of a house. These welcome reforms, which we certainly support, may not bring the relief that people expect unless they go hand in hand with the inbuilt right to extend the shortening lease of a flat.

Sir George Young: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for advisory services for residents who may want to exercise the rights that Parliament proposes to extend to them. I shall consult relevant organisations to try to find a good way of advising residents who wish to enfranchise themselves. Next week we shall publish a document to follow the statement, and that will give more details of our proposals. I agree that professional legal advice is needed.

The hon. Member asked about extending leases. As I said, we looked at that, but it would make more complex the principal objective, which is enfranchisement. if individual tenants are given the right to extend their lease and they try to exercise the right to acquire their freehold, they will be confronted by leaseholders with a wide range of differing interests. It is much better collectively to give leaseholders the right to buy the freehold. When they have done that, they can extend their leases at no cost to themselves for as long as they want. That is a better approach than the individual extension of leases by the landlord.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): I declare an interest as an owner of leasehold property.

Very few people object to commonhold in principle, although its merits are greatly exaggerated and its effect on the appearance of central London may be catastrophic. However, many people find the compulsion element objectionable. Because the valuation does not include the full reversionary value, the Government are handing to the tenant large, immediate, and tax-free capital gains at the expense of the freeholder. That may buy votes, but it is not equitable.

Sir George Young: I understand my hon. Friend's point. It is important to understand that the values of the transactions are not the confiscatory values that are enshrined in existing legislation. We want to mirror market value. For example, blocks are currently changing hands between willing buyers and willing sellers. Where there is disagreement, we propose to mirror the arrangement that there should not be a confiscatory price but the price that would have been arrived at if both buyer and seller were willing. On that basis there will be slightly less anxiety among the freeholders on whose behalf my hon. Friend has just spoken.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Like others, I welcome the Government's statement, although I am rather surprised that the Minister has chosen to make it on a Friday. There is no great urgency, and I always thought that Mr. Speaker—I cannot speak for him, of course—did not smile benignly on non-urgent statements being made on a Friday when Back Benchers want to make speeches.

The Minister said, and has just underlined it, that leasehold properties will be sold at market values. Why will there be no discount for private sector properties when there was a discount for council properties? Could that have something to do with the Government's approach to publicly owned property, which they see as second rate and to be given away or sold off at a heavy discount, as against their approach to private property, which they see as being sacrosanct? Will the ability to purchase extend to Duchy of Cornwall property?

Sir George Young: The answer to the last question is no. As I said, the Crown is exempt.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the Government do not have the mandate on private assets that they have on public assets. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that, under the arrangements that I have made, there is no discount. The price that the tenants pay will not be the open market value. It will reflect the fact that they are in possession and have long leases. Therefore, I do not accept the validity of the hon. Gentleman's argument.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My hon. Friend's announcement will bring great pleasure to the citizens of Westminster, not least to those in my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). It is especially appreciated that he paid a warm tribute to our late friend and colleague Sir Brandon Rhys Williams for his campaign, which has culminated today. The gist of what my hon. Friend has announced must wash over to the comparatively small number of residents of leasehold property where the higher rateable value limit applies in the centre of London. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Bill to be introduced will enable the House to table an amendment to give such residents the right to enfranchise under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 as well?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a long-time campaigner on this matter and who served on the Nugee committee, which introduced fresh and welcome rights for long leasholders. What I have announced today does not cover highly rated houses, so that will not be covered in the Bill, but if the House so wished to amend the Bill, an amendment would be possible within the long title.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I have heard some hypocrisy in my time, but this beats it. Tory Members have spoken about their late colleague Brandon Rhys Williams.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

He introduced ten-minute rule Bills on leasehold reform and every member of the Labour party followed him into the Lobby, but when they came up for Second Reading on Fridays at the end of business, what happened? The Government Chief Whip or one of his aides would shout "Object" and stop the hon. Gentleman getting the Bills on the statute book.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) many years ago wrote the part of the Labour party manifesto that deals with leasehold reform. Now, after 12 years of Tory rule, they come along on a Friday just before an election with this announcement. It is an election sprat to catch a mackerel. The chances are that the Bill will not become law, because if there is an election in spring or autumn it will not have passed into law, so that all these wonderful ideas will be cast aside. If the Minister wants to do something decent about housing, why does he not do something for all those in London and elsewhere who are living in cardboard boxes, and give them a roof over their heads?

Sir George Young: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's consensus-building remarks. Many of the ideas of Sir Brandon Rhys Williams took time to take root and flourish. He was a far-sighted Member of Parliament with important views on a whole range of social issues, such as family support and housing support, and tribute has rightly been paid to him.

We consulted on this matter last year. We published a document in November. We took the views of the House and of other organisations. Consultation ended, and the Government have announced their conclusions. There is nothing rushed or dramatic about this. It is a sensible evolution of the Government's housing policy, bringing home ownership within the reach of more people, devolving responsibility to people who live in flats so that they can take charge of their own lives. It is wholly with the grain of Government housing policy over the past 12 years.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) drew attention to my views, which I shall not express——

Mr. Tony Banks: You see!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall endeavour to call those hon. Members who have been rising, but I ask them to be brief.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): My hon. Friend will already know how widely welcome his statement will be in Dulwich, where many of my constituents are long leaseholders of the estates governors of Alleyn's College of God's Gift. They bought their leases in the 1960s and have seen them diminish to become unmarketable assets. They suffer stress and anxiety in their flats, imprisoned without any escape because they cannot realise the value of their asset and move elsewhere. Today's statement gives them hope of freedom.

Sir George Young: I am glad that the announcement will be welcome in Dulwich.

Many freeholders have had a policy of not selling freeholds. I hope that, in the light of today's announcement, they will revise that policy and, in advance of the Bill, start discussions with leaseholders about the transfer of the freehold. My hon. Friend rightly points out the difficulty of marketing flats, and of getting a mortgage on a flat, once the lease goes below a certain number of years. As a result of our announcement, people will be able to enfranchise themselves collectively and extend their leases, thereby making them more marketable and an easier asset against which to borrow money.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): My hon. Friend's announcement will be greatly welcome in my constituency because it will right a long-standing wrong about the treatment of leaseholders by increasingly difficult landlords. In particular, they will be pleased about the right to an enfranchisement and the right to force landlords to sell the freehold.

I associate myself with the congratulations extended to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) and to Sir Brandon Rhys Williams. However, the House should not leave out from its congratulations my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, who has guided us through the legal minefield of legislation on this matter that caused considerable delays in implementing the ideas of Sir Brandon Rhys Williams. Will my hon. Friend consider carefully introducing the Bill as soon as possible, preferably before the next election, because of the urgent need of leaseholders all over London?

Sir George Young: The last plea will have fallen on the ears of those far more important than I as they plan the management of the business of the House.

My hon. Friend rightly draws the attention of the House to the fact that the Lord Chancellor is the sponsor of Bills on leasehold reform, and I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for the key part that he has played in this. Although the majority of freeholders are responsible people, a minority of unscrupulous freeholders make life a misery for tenants; they harass them and are incompetent. Today's announcement will be particularly welcomed by leaseholders who live in blocks of flats controlled by such freeholders.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Despite the almost universal welcome this morning, no doubt this was not an easy decision to reach, particularly on compulsion, and the absolute right to buy from unwilling freeholders. I congratulate my hon. Friend on grasping that nettle. Will he clarify an answer that he gave earlier which suggested that, if the freeholder or landlord has his principal residence in a block, he would have the right to veto and to override the desire of other tenants to buy? That would cause considerable difficulties, so I should be grateful if my hon. Friend will explain the meaning of his earlier answer.

Sir George Young: That exemption will not apply to purpose-built blocks of flats. As I tried to explain earlier, the exemption will apply where, for example, the owner of a terraced house converts it into three self-contained flats and continues to occupy one of them. In those circumstance, it is not proposed at this stage that the other people who live in the building should have the right collectively to buy him out. If the House has strong views to the contrary, we shall look at the matter as the Bill progresses.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: I begin with a confession: I have not spent the last decade lobbying for this measure.

However, it will greatly benefit people who live in central London. Housing policy has been bedevilled in recent years by highly partisan approaches to it. At last we have a measure that commands widespread support in the House. I shall do all I can to help my hon. Friend to nudge the powers-that-be to his immediate right to give this thoroughly sensible and worthwhile measure considerable priority.

Sir George Young: The last exhortation needed no intermediary assistance from me. My hon. Friend's remarks will have been heard by those who sit on the Treasury Bench. My hon. Friend's energies have been applied elsewhere with equal effect. The fact that the proposals seem to command all-party support is good news in terms of their prospects for legislative passage through the House.

Mr. Simon Hughes: In this Session?

Sir George Young: I have nothing to add about the specific timetable.

I agree that now that the announcement has been made the expectations of many people, particularly Londoners, will have been raised.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): It would be proper for me to declare an interest as a freehold owner.

Is my hon. Friend aware how very welcome his statement will be in my constituency of Walthamstow, particularly to the residents of Fernhill Court? The leases are well under 50 years and the freeholder does not look after their best interests. Will my hon. Friend at least consider devising a scheme whereby such people can be helped—perhaps in the form of a deemed commonhold—to get out of the grasp of the freeholder, with compensation being paid to the freeholder in due course when the deemed commonholder either dies or moves away from the flats?

Sir George Young: I hope that the advice that we intend to publish next week, combined with improved advisory services for associations that look after the interests of residents, will be particularly relevant. In the short term, the best advice that I can give to my hon. Friend is that those who live in that block of flats should seek legal advice to find out what protection they have under existing legislation, as their problem seems to be a fairly immediate one.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): This announcement will be warmly welcomed by many of my constituents and by hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country. It will bring an end to fear and uncertainty. Does my hon. Friend agree that bipartisan support for the proposals is also to be warmly welcomed? Does he also agree that the claim to authorship by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) is about as convincing as his claim to have invented the right to buy? It is yet another example of being able to steal a slogan, but we cannot steal ideas that would never have occurred to us.

Sir George Young: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am glad that the proposals will be warmly welcomed in west London.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am delighted that you are in the Chair, Mr. Speaker, while this welcome statement on housing is being made, since I understand that in your attic has been discovered space for 25 homeless Members of Parliament. Let us hope that they do not attract your ear rather than your eye, once they move in.

May I ask the Minister to consider the problems faced by those who live in tied houses? At a meeting of our Back Benchers committee the Minister referred to the Conservative party's policies on housing. This statement is all of a piece; it is far-ranging and very farsighted. These policies will empower many more people to enjoy comfortable and safe housing.

Given the long ancestry, in Conservative terms, of this statement, will the Minister remind Opposition Members that, as they have degenerated into used policy dealers, I hope that they will find a ready home for second-hand CND membership cards in the front office of the new general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind words. Of course we shall look at the tied housing issue. I hope that my hon. Friend will write to me about it. Lest there be any misunderstanding, I do not believe that the 25 Members of Parliament who will be living above Mr. Speaker will have any right, under the announcement that I have just made, to acquire the property. Therefore, they pose no threat to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Environment

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

11.34 am

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I hope that the atmosphere of general goodwill and accord will continue and that we can deal with the question of the environment on an all-party basis, not on the partisan and biased political basis that was a feature of the debate earlier this morning.

On behalf of the Select Committee on the Environment, I warmly welcome the statement made by the Prime Minister on 8 July that it is the Government's intention to set up an environmental protection agency which

"will bring together Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution and related functions of the National Rivers Authority."

The idea was first launched in the Environment Committee's second report on toxic waste, ordered to be printed by the House on 22 February 1989. The preface to that document refers to how that concept or idea emerged.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: The hon. Gentleman made that point earlier this morning, but I checked the details a few minutes ago and found that as early as 1987 the Labour party made a specific commitment in its policy document to introduce legislation as a matter of urgency when a Labour Government came to office.

Sir Hugh Rossi: If the hon. Gentleman wants to go back into history, I too, can do so. I did not want to mention this matter, but the germ of the idea first grew out of our report on the pollution of rivers and estuaries, published just before the general election in 1987. The Committee proposed that a National Rivers Authority should be established as a national regulatory authority.

I remember discussing the matter with the late Allan Roberts who was a member of my Committee. I expressed the wish that this could become all-party policy. I said that I would do my best to persuade the Government. He said that he would do his best to persuade the Labour party to accept this as official policy. At that time Allan Roberts was having discussions with the then Opposition spokesman on the environment, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). The message that came back to me was that the idea commended itself to the Labour party. It matters not how a good idea emerges. What is important is that it is adopted. Nothing delights me more than that this policy has been adopted by the Opposition, the Government and also, I understand, by the minority parties. Therefore we have consensus. Everybody agrees that the nation requires such a policy.

I am delighted that the Select Committee's hard work, over many years, has been recognised and adopted. The concept was generated by an all-party Committee of the House after many inquiries, over many years. It concluded that a national regulatory body of this sort was necessary. That justified the many hours of hard work of Select Committee members in studying and collating evidence from all quarters so that recommendations could be made that would be universally accepted. All the recommendations were agreed unanimously by the Committee. The environmental protection agency emerged out of Parliament's traditional role of examining the work of the Executive. There will be a general election soon and each side will try to prove to the electorate that it is greener than the others and that it thought of the idea first. However, the record is plain for everyone to see. It is not simply what is written that matters, but the informal discussions that take place between hon. Members so that ideas like this emerge.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has accepted the idea, although it required a great deal of consideration by the Government, having set up the NRA as a residual authority with responsibility for leisure pursuits on water, for sea defences and land drainage which the Select Committee felt was a distraction from what should be the agency's core purpose.

If the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) were to read the preface to the toxic waste report, and consider it in conjunction with what I have said about the history of the matter, he would learn that we said:

"we are attracted by the concept of replacing all the existing Waste Disposal Authorities with about ten new authorities in England and Wales, regulated by a national body . . . We had hoped that this national body might be the same national body which we had previously recommended be created to regulate river pollution."

That is how the idea emerged and was accepted.

We then proposed the shape and form that the "Environmental Protection Commission," as we called it in paragraph 12 of the preface to the toxic waste report, should take. We said that it would be

"charged with an overall responsibility for safeguarding environmental quality in the United Kingdom. This responsibility would include:

a. monitoring environmental quality and publishing appropriate statistics;
b. control of all discharges to the external environment;
c. raising environmental standards and the status and professionalism of environmental control through provision of advice and guidance, commissioning research, developing standards and expertise on the impacts of pollution, and promoting clean technology;
d. keeping under review the adequacy of existing arrangements for environmental protection and submitting to the Government proposals for new primary legislation, regulations and codes of practice as appropriate; and
e. supporting the United Kingdom's role in international environmental affairs."

I submit that that is a blueprint for the environmental protection agency.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did not spell out the form or shape of the new agency. However, he said that there would be consultations on the matter. I am sure that my Select Committee will want to take part in that process, examine the proposals further and present our considerations in the light of other experiences and evidence that we have obtained since we published the toxic waste report two years ago.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's statement raised some items for further discussion and I am sure that my Committee will return to them in a more considered fashion later. However, I want to put my hon. Friend the Minister on notice in respect of those matters and if he can respond to them this morning, I shall be more than grateful.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the Secretary of State for Scotland would announce his own proposal shortly. However, there was no mention of Northern Ireland. Last November we recommended an environmental protection agency for Northern Ireland, but that was not accepted. What will be the future

direction for environmental policy in the Province? Given the relatively small area and population of the Province, it could be argued that Northern Ireland has the strongest case for the establishment of an EPA as quickly as possible.

We recognise the conflict between the need for national standards and the need for rapid local response to pollution incidents. The Prime Minister's announcement says nothing about structure. Will the new agency work through a regional structure, as the NRA already does? In our previous reports, we have shown how, with regard to water and waste regulation, the river basin concept—the river catchment area being identical to the responsible authority's area—commends itself much more than the historic and artificial boundaries between local authorities. The river basin concept is more closely related to the way in which water flows, how contaminated land pollutes that water, and other such matters. I hope that that point will be given serious consideration.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has suffered from staff shortages and low morale. It seemed to us that the regionalisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution did not meet with universal approval. How will the creation of the new agency affect the work of the existing inspectorates? That is a matter of supreme importance. If the concept does not operate on the ground, we may have a grandiose bureaucratic structure, but that will not help to deal with the problems about which we are all concerned.

According to the Prime Minister's speech, the Government are clearly undecided about taking waste regulation into the new agency. In the toxic waste report to which I have referred, the Select Committee expressed concern about the low standards of some local authority regulators and we recommended a system of about 10 waste regulation authorities for England and Wales based on the London regulatory authority.

Our initial reaction is that waste regulation should be part of the agency's remit and we should like the Government to re-evaluate our original recommendation, especially in the light of the present review of local government and the implications for local authorities' waste regulation and disposal functions. All those matters arise directly from the Prime Minister's statement and this has been our first opportunity to raise questions about them and to debate them.

More generally, the Prime Minister's speech highlighted the fact that in one sense it is impossible to talk about "The United Kingdom's Environment". On issues such as global warming, degradation of the ozone layer, the maintenance of bio-diversity and marine pollution, the United Kingdom must be considered as part of a global environmental system. That brings me closer to home. We are experiencing being part of the European environment as the Commission's role in the formulation of environmental policies grows ever stronger. I do not know whether the House is aware of this, but the European Court of Justice recently issued a ruling in the titanium dioxide case from which it appears likely that in future that EEC directives will be agreed only by a qualified majority vote. That is important and significant for us in this Parliament.

It may be very difficult for us to scrutinise legislation early enough in order to ensure that the United Kingdom's interests are properly protected. The Select Committee had difficulty in having discussions with the European Commission on some of its proposals. That is regrettable because it means that we do not have an early opportunity during the formulation of policy to say to the Commission, "Yes, that's a very good idea, but it won't really work in the United Kingdom because our geography or geology is different." We had such a difficulty with the landfill proposals that are coming out of Brussels at the moment. Originally, it was proposed not to allow the co-disposal of industrial and domestic waste, by which method 80 per cent. of our waste in this country today is disposed.

It is important that, when Europe considers legislation that will be of universal blanket application, this House, through its representatives—it does not matter whether it be a Select Committee or a Standing Committee—has an early opportunity to consider those matters before the proposal is written on tablets of stone. It is of increasing anxiety and concern for the Select Committee that we are not adequately putting across the United Kingdom case. In that respect, the Government can help. We feel that, perhaps, the team that the Department of the Environment sends to discuss such matters with DG XI should be strengthened by the use of outside experts and consultants. That does not seem to be the case at the moment. My hon. Friend knows my views on this matter; they are reflected in our reports. However, I welcome the opportunity to state my view more publicly on the Floor of the House.

The Committee is concerned—it has mentioned it in report after report and found it in inquiry after inquiry—that we are lagging behind in our research into these matters in the United Kingdom. Far more emphasis must be put into environmental research. The science budget of the Natural Environment Research Council is presently forecast to decline in real value by 10 per cent. over the five year period 1990-91 to 1994-95.

There is much emotion in environmental issues. It is more than important to ensure that whatever action we take and whatever resources we make available are directed at the real problem in respect of which action should be taken, and there should be priorities in such issues. That cannot be done if we are allowed to push, or allow ourselves to be pushed, one way or the other in policy making by pure emotive reactions. We need a sound science base for decisions. The Government cannot have a sound science base unless they are prepared to make resources available to people whose lives are dedicated to carrying out research into these matters.

I should like, for example, the proposed environmental protection agency to make full use of the services offered by the Warren Spring laboratories the hydrological research people, and all the other arms of research that have recently been hived off. For that purpose, the agency will need not only the staff but the resources to be able to commission that important research. It will also need resources if it is to carry out proper monitoring and police work, to have its own scientific laboratories, or to be able to commission scientific laboratories in the various regions that I have indicated to my hon. Friend the Minister as a pattern for control by the EPA. The agency needs to be able to draw upon the best available scientific advice.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister several questions concerning my Committee's recommendations which are still outstanding. On toxic waste, the Government promised to take steps to facilitate the production of more comprehensive and usable data on waste arisings and disposal. We have revealed that there is

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

still a lack of centralised statistics in our current inquiry into landfill waste. We regret that, having come back to the same subject through another inquiry, we find that that recommendation has not been fulfilled in accordance with the Government's promises to our Committee.

The Government also did not accept our recommendation for the regulation of the dumping of colliery waste at sea or on the foreshore and that such regulation should be transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to HMIP. I ask that that question be addressed once again. Our recommendation for strict liability for waste producers was also rejected. The principles governing United Kingdom law on civil liability in respect of waste are still unclear, notwithstanding the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The proposed directives on landfill waste and on civil liability could overturn the legislation that we have tentatively proposed in this Parliament. Therefore, I again ask the Government to consider strict liability on the part of waste producers.

With regard to contaminated land, it has been a matter of great regret for the Committee that the caveat emptor rule on sales of land remains. We feel that the registers that have been proposed, in accepting our recommendation that local authorities prepare registers of potentially contaminated land, and inquiries by professional advisers are not sufficient to protect the public. An owner of land normally has a good idea of what he has done with that land and what lies under it. There is no reason why he should be allowed to conceal what he knows. Therefore, there should be a machinery in law requiring him to make full disclosure when he places his property on the market in those circumstances.

Our recommendation that the interdepartmental committee on the redevelopment of contaminated land be abolished and a contaminated land unit be set up within HMIP was also rejected. Now that a full-blown agency or commission is being proposed, I ask the Government to reconsider the proposal in the light of the new structure.

On pollution of beaches, we described the position of the Department of the Environment on eutrophication of coastal and fresh waters as complacent. We recommended greater consideration of the impact of phosphorus and other nutrients and, where appropriate, nutrient removal at sewage treatment works, such as we saw when we were in Northern Ireland. The Government thought that our criticism was unfair, but the NRA has accepted the need to review arrangements for collecting and analysing data relating to coastal eutrophication.

The Government also rejected our recommendation for a full technical and economic evaluation of technologies for disposing of sewage sludge and for more support for and R and D on alternative uses. The Government said that it was a matter for the water industry. From my continuing discussions with local authorities, water companies and the waste disposal industry, I know that there is a crying need for central guidance in such matters. A range of technologies are being offered on the market, whether they be the composting of waste, the incineration of waste, the spreading of waste on agricultural land or a variety of other methods such as biodegradation, farming with bugs and so on. Most people have no idea how to select or whether they are selecting the right method. Is it beyond the resources of Government to have a central research unit that can test various technologies and issue papers giving guidance to those who must buy them in the marketplace? After all, if we are dealing with the scientific treatment of certain unwelcome pollutants, the laws of nature are such that after proper research and investigation, it should be relatively easy to choose the best method of treatment because it is no longer a matter of opinion, but of scientific assessment.

Who is best placed to do that? I suggest that it is not the various water companies. I am certain that my hon. Friend will find a great willingness in our universities to help, on a contractual basis, with the research that is needed in so many areas. Perhaps the Department of the Environment officials in Marsham street felt that that was outside their remit as administrators, but if we are to have an environment protection agency to advise on the regulations that are to be made, that agency should be able to commission research such as I have described.

I realise the difficulties that particular Departments encounter. I am sending my hon. Friend the Minister away to talk to his Secretary of State, who will then have to go into Cabinet and argue with his colleagues who have equal demands for increased expenditure on education and social security and on all the other things that are desirable and that the people of this country want. It is difficult to have everything that one wants immediately, but my Committee would welcome a statement from the Government that they are sympathetically considering the ideas that we have put forward and that, as resources become available, they will progress towards them in an orderly and structured fashion. I am sure that if we could do that we would elevate environmental policy and remove it from the party political bull ring——

Mr. Trippier: We shall never do that.

Sir Hugh Rossi: My hon. Friend says that we will never do that, but the Select Committee has been able to do it. The important thing is the right idea and, if we have the right idea and people of good will on all sides, I am sure that it will be accepted and acted upon. I do not mind where the idea comes from—the important thing is that it is accepted.

I have given my hon. Friend the Minister a certain amount of stick, but he has broad shoulders and can accept it. I know that he is personally sympathetic and wishes to progress as far as he can and to be of as much assistance as he can in these matters.

Finally, therefore, I should like to show my even-handedness and to return to a question that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) refused to allow me to ask her when she was talking about the last Labour Administration's expenditure on water. She said that the figure was about three times as much as had been spent previously. My question is, do the figures that the hon. Lady consistently quotes include the costs of the development of the Keilder dam and of the reservoir in Ditchley, outside Heathrow? That policy was laid down by the 1970-74 Conservative Administration and contracts were let and, given that contracts had been let, the Labour Government were bound to spend that money, which was on an increasingly rising graph. However, because they were forced to spend the money in that direction, they then lamentably failed to maintain the necessary investment in sewage treatment plants. That was the reason for the situation that my Committee discovered when it inquired

into the pollution of rivers and estuaries—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady's hon. Friends who serve on the Committee accepted that that was the scenario. If she reads our report more carefully, she will find that it states in terms that the condition of our rivers and estuaries in 1987 was due in no small part to the lack of investment between 1974 and 1979, and to the long lead time that was necessary to recoup that loss of investment.

I hope that I have been even-handed in my censures of both parties. I hope also that the positive suggestions that I have outlined on behalf of the Select Committee on the Environment will be taken forward seriously.

12.5 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Before I start my speech, I ask the House to accept that I shall have to leave immediately after it because I have to attend the funeral of a constituent whose family I have known for many years and who was murdered some weeks ago. The funeral is this afternoon in south London.

I shall follow in one respect the speech of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). The hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, said that there appeared to be agreement among the three main parties represented in the House on the need to set up an environmental protection agency. He described me as the representative of the minority parties. As far as the public are concerned, we are all minority parties. None of us commands majority support. Only this place distorts that picture. We should remember that fact in environmental policy, as in everything else.

The hon. Gentleman called for cross-party agreement. That is a desirable objective, but I am sure that he does not expect that any Government should be immune from criticism from the parties that are not in government if they fail to live up to the best standards or to move as quickly as others think they should.

I welcome the debate and the fact that we are at last debating the environment in Government time. However, I share the view that we are making an anomalous distinction if we try to debate the environment by subdividing it into the United Kingdom environment and the rest. That is a failure. This first attempt is welcome but botched in one respect in terms of trying to reform the procedures of the House. The Government have been put under pressure by myself and others to provide an annual occasion for debating the problems of the environment. We should follow the example of the United States Congress and hold a debate following the presentation of a report. Such a report could be presented by the Select Committee on the Environment or by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which could have an extended remit, subject to later cross-examination by the Select Committee. The report could then come before the House as part of an ordered timetable of Government and parliamentary business. That debate should be long enough to allow us to discuss British, European and global environmental matters. I hope that that will happen.

Although I welcome today's debate, it is unfortunate that it is being held on a Friday. Although it is better held on a Friday than never, it is a fact that our Friday business is not held to be as important as our Monday to Thursday business, for reasons of which we are all aware. I hope that this debate will not preclude us from having a debate in the proper cycle. I understand from Government announcements that, following the publication of the environment White Paper last year, the new Secretary of State has said that a follow-up document will be produced this autumn and will examine the Government's record on implementing some of the proposals that were contained in the White Paper and the Government's environmental record over the past year. I welcome that.

The sequence of events ought to be that we have a Government annual report, which I presume that we shall receive in September and, if Parliament is continuing, we debate it as the Government's contribution to the debate thereafter. I hope that we shall get into a habit of doing things in that order in Parliament. The Government and outside bodies should make an annual commentary on what progress they believe has been made which can then be debated in the House.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he agree that one of the fundamental things that we must establish to ensure that the debate takes place in the right context and with the right degree of openness is proper freedom of access to environmental information? Otherwise, statistics will be bandied about meaninglessly.

Mr. Hughes: I entirely agree. Freedom of information, and especially of environmental information, is important. When I hear cross-party dispute about facts and figures, I often reflect that it would be wonderful, if it were possible, to have machinery which made a loud noise whenever anyone mentioned a statistic or fact that was clearly untrue. I wonder how often Members' speeches would be precluded from being heard by the truth buzzer when environmental or policy porkies were shouted across the Floor of the House.

One of the problems about debates such as this is that they suffer from allegation and counter-allegation. The figures on the water industry are a good example of that. It is certainly true that investment by the Labour party when it was in government was higher than the average investment in the Tory years. Yet it is also true that the investments fell from 1974 to 1979 as a result of the intervention of the International Monetary Fund. The total Labour investment ended up being lower than the Tory average. Both of those sets of statistics are true, but we must ensure that people outside understand how they are interpreted.

We can say about environmental politics in Britain in the past decade that all political parties represented in the House are much more conscious of and committed to reforms to support protection of the environment than they were a decade ago. I welcome the fact that the Government have moved a considerable way. Inevitably, my view is that they have not moved far enough. There are substantial issues on which they could have moved further. There are fundamental flaws in the philosophy and politics of the present Tory party which have prevented the environment from being the priority that it should have been, but I welcome what movement there has been.

I welcome the fact that the Labour party has moved, too. The Labour party's record in government was not good. Since then, many things have happened and it has been persuaded. There are still obvious defects in its policies. One which is often pointed out by Conservative

[Mr. Hughes]

Back-Bench Members is that Labour is tied to certain interest groups who influence its policies in certain areas. It has made that judgment, which has resulted in certain weaknesses. The Labour party has had a commitment over the years to the nuclear industry, the coal industry and so on.

It is a weakness in my case that I cannot point to what Liberal Democrats or Liberals have done in government and say that they are wonderful environmentalists. However, I can point to our record in local government. We have a good record. I pray that in aid of our commitment to the environment over many years. Objective analysts will say that in policy commitment we have been more advanced, progressive and committed. I leave that for others to judge.

We should all recognise that the advancement of environmental politics and commitment owes a great deal to people who are not represented in this House. It owes a great deal to the Green party, which has had its heyday and has subsequently declined. It pushed us. Certainly the Euro-elections gave the three largest parties in the House a shock. It also owes a great deal to environmental pressures groups such as Greenpeace, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Friends of the Earth and so on. They have made sure that we are up to the mark. Bodies such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales and statutory bodies such as the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council have all kept on the pressure. We welcome that and we have all benefited from their efforts. I hope that in the future we shall see slightly less aggressive counter-reaction from the Government to proposals and criticisms from, say, Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth. The Minister sometimes gets excitable when Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth or the World Wide Fund for Nature make allegations about Government policy and its effectiveness. Such organisations have done a good service in arguing the case on environmental issues, and we should recognise that.

The other test is how well we are doing in relation to our European colleagues. We are improving, and in some areas we have led the way. But in many areas we have not led the way. The European Community has often been the motor in making us substantially improve our policies. Without pressure from the European Commission, we would not have moved nearly as quickly as we have done on the bathing beaches directive or water pollution standards.

It was not accidental that we were called the dirty man of Europe in the 1980s. In many ways, we were. That does not mean that all European countries were better at everything. Some countries were better in theory, but less good in practice because they commit themselves in theory but do not deliver the goods. The European Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, and other Commissioners and directors-general have also done a service. The commitment of the Commissioner and his predecessor have pushed us much further.

If people ask me for a justification for our increasing involvement in and adherence to the EC, I cite environmental policy. It has served us and the country well and pushed the Government further and faster than they would otherwise have moved.

My last point about the structural aspect of the debate is that we are beginning the sequence of debates which will lead up to the Brazil conference in June next year to which the Prime Minister referred in his speech on Monday and to which hon. Members have referred in the House. I hope that we can have proper and careful consideration of the line that Britain should take before the conference in June. If there is not an election in autumn, it will probably be in the spring. We cannot be certain which Ministers will go to Brazil. I hope that I shall be there myself in an official capacity. That possibility should not be excluded. According to the latest opinion polls, no overall control is a high possibility.

Whichever Ministers attend the conference, we do not know now who they will be. Therefore, it is important that we do what the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green wants, which is to seek as much agreement as possible about what the Government's policy should be at the conference on behalf of the people of Britain. I hope that that is possible and that the Minister and his colleagues will respond. I hope that we can have a debate in the House and in another place soon after the summer to decide what our policy should be at the United Nations conference on the environment and development in Brazil next June.

One thing that was welcome about the Prime Minister's speech on Monday was that he made it. He did not take as long to make a speech on the environment as his predecessor took. It was a welcome acknowledgement that the Government give importance to the issue. However, I have to say that there were weaknesses in it. The fundamental weakness was that he accepted only conditionally that the Government should make commitments, and only where others did as well as we did. The obvious example is carbon dioxide emissions. The Prime Minister said:

> "The United Kingdom has committed itself to act. We have said that if others do their part, we shall return emissions of CO_2 to 1990 levels by 2005."

The Minister knows that I and my colleagues believe that the commitment should not be conditional on others playing their part, although I accept that the United States has a far greater part to play, and that to return to the present level in 15 years is not nearly a sufficiently tough target.

Mr. Trippier: Until we came to this part, I thought that the hon. Gentleman was making a fair and reasoned speech. I am anxious to know precisely the Liberal position on CO_2 emissions as a matter of record. I am more interested in knowing the Labour position because I might take that a little more seriously. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) would pipe down a little, we might get the matter off our chests.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said at a conference that I attended with him on Saturday that, of course, the Liberal party is committed to phasing out nuclear power. I think that I am right in saying that its manifesto proposes to do so by the year 2020. I and my hon. Friends believe that to go for a faster target by the year 2000 on stabilisation and reduction does not stack up. I will obtain a more decent reply on that than I obtained from the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). What is the answer?

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Energy efficiency.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Energy efficiency.

Mr. Hughes: I have a backing group. With the chorus behind me, it is rather like appearing on "Top of the Pops". I shall answer the Minister's question in a moment.

In the past year there have been various occasions when the Government have not done what they said they would. I want to list those things on which the Government did not live up to their promises. Their rejection of the hedgerow amendment to the Planning and Compensation Bill was a failure to honour a previous commitment. That was a black mark against the Government. Their refusal to accept the principle of sustainable development in the Planning and Compensation Bill showed that when it comes to including environmentally sound principles in legislation the Government have failed to deliver. That is especially true in that case, as the Government said that that principle was something with which everyone would agree. The publication in May of the mineral forecasts that predict an increase in demand of 60 per cent. until the year 2011 shows that that industry is unconstrained by environmental criteria, despite the recognition by Government and others of the environmental costs of mineral extraction.

Some issues are still to be addressed including, for example, the problem of a potential shortage of water. I accept that we have plenty of it coming down, but the problem is what we do with it after that. There have been problems with over-extraction and drought is bound to occur in certain parts of the country. Hosepipe bans are already in operation.

Mr. Mans *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I am sorry, but I shall not give way. As I have already explained, I have a funeral to attend and I do not want to speak for much longer.

There are also associated problems concerned with water leakage. We have not properly grasped the environmental assessment principle that was included in the White Paper. We have not resolved the conflict between the environment and agriculture, as was demonstrated by reaction of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the common agricultural policy reforms proposed by the Agriculture Commissioner.

I understand that the "green" Ministers have met only once this year. I also understand that the Cabinet sub-committee—MICS. 141—has met only once in the past year. That suggests that the Government's structural commitment to pull environmental issues together is not strong.

I have tabled many questions to each Department to discover how they have implemented the White Paper, and some of their responses have been feeble. The Government must be honest about where they have failed.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) referred to a report recently published by the global environment research centre at Imperial college entitled "Institutions and Sustainable Development". The Minister should read that report as it makes fundamental criticisms of the structure of government and their inability to co-ordinate environmental policy. At present it is in a terrible muddle and has not been combined in a functionally effective manner. The Minister should read the summary of that report as well as the report itself so that he can deal with the problems identified.

My party believes that there should be a major structural reform of the Department, but, above all, the Treasury is central to environmental sustainable development. We must stop relying on the GDP and GNP indicators as measures of success. We must use a much more environmentally accountable set of indices. David Pearce made that clear in his report. Unless the Treasury policy reflects sustainable environmental principles, everything else will be second rate. In passing, the Government should set much tougher targets on many emissions, not just CO_2 emissions.

The Minister asked me about energy and energy policy. We had a spat about that in environment questions earlier this week. I was disappointed with the Minister's reply as it was not an accurate description of my party's policy; nor did it take into account what should have been the obvious answer. I asked why so little importance had been attached to the Select Committee reports of this House and the other place on energy conservation and efficiency. The Minister said that it was no good for me to argue about that when my party wanted to scrap the nuclear programme and increase the dependence on coal.

I accept that my party is committed to scrapping the nuclear programme by 2020 or earlier—whether that appears in the manifesto is another matter. However, we have never stated that we are committed to an increased dependence on coal—that is wrong. I should be happy for the Minister to study all our policy announcements; he will see no evidence of that commitment.

The dilemma is how to reduce emissions, achieve tougher targets, and still provide the energy the country needs. Energy policy is one of the crucial tests of Government environmental policy. The answer, as the hon. Members for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) rightly said, is energy efficiency. I would add energy conservation. I want to cite the evidence that backs that, as I wish to persuade the Minister.

Dr. Barry Dale, the chief scientist of the energy technology support unit, which is sponsored by the Department of Energy, has said that a threefold increase in nuclear power—12 more nuclear power stations—could, at most, provide 11 per cent. of the necessary reduction in CO_2 emissions. He described that percentage as an "economically feasible" reduction. If we had 20 more nuclear power stations, that would still mean that, at best, CO_2 emissions would be reduced by 11 per cent. However, energy conservation and efficiency could reduce CO_2 emissions by 40 per cent.

I gather that the House of Lords Select Committee on Energy report has not been formally published, but it states that the structure of the industry created since privatisation makes it much more difficult for us to meet our targets. Under the new system a generator does not have a financial interest in reducing consumer demand. That committee also argues that market forces need a fiscal boost from the Government to aid energy efficiency. We have proposed that in our alternative budget, but amendments to that effect to the Finance Bill were resisted. The report also says:

"Market forces alone will not produce a level of investment in energy efficiency sufficient to meet the Community's stated objective."

That objective is a further 20 per cent. reduction in emissions.

Mr. Roger King: What is the effect of high energy prices? If the hon. Gentleman visited a Rover plant in my constituency, he would discover that people are for ever complaining about the high price of energy. There already exists a drive to reduce the cost of energy by being ever more efficient. There is little need for extra motivation.

Mr. Hughes: All the experts argue that there is a need for extra incentives and motivation. Prices are, of course, important. The supply industry must decide whether to spend money on advertising—an unnecessary cost—or on encouraging conservation. The hon. Gentleman must accept that the supply industry is subject to different motivations.

The budget of the Energy Efficiency Office is half the level of five years ago. The Select Committee says that the Government were wrong to cut its budget. The office needs more money to respond effectively and I appreciate that the sums involved have risen recently simply because of the switching of the home energy efficiency scheme from the Department of Social Security to the Department of Energy. It will be the second report in three months to criticise the Government and I hope that the Government take that seriously, remembering that the Select Committee on Energy in this House made the same criticism. It said that energy efficiency responsibility should be transferred away from the Energy Department to elsewhere in government.

I am happy to go through our figures. I have heard Department of Energy officials say in public that we could manage as a country to be dependent within 50 years on only renewable resources if we sufficiently prioritised energy efficiency and conservation, and that is without nuclear power.

Mr. Trippier: I do not dispute the fact that we must go for energy efficiency, and the Government are committed to that, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware from the White Paper. Indeed, nothing can be achieved by way of stabilising CO_2 emissions unless we go down that road. The trouble is that the hon. Gentleman's figures do not stand up. It is not a case of simply improving efficiency from the existing base. To replace the present 20 per cent. nuclear contribution would require action within a short time scale.

Had the hon. Gentleman said—because he is stuck with his party's target of the year 2000—that, even if we lived in a mad world and the Liberals were to get power, they would not start to wind down the nuclear industry until the year 2000, that would have been more credible, because the figures might begin to add up. But he and his party would start to wind it down immediately.

Mr. Hughes: I shall deal briefly with the Minister's intervention and then, if I may, come and see him to discuss it because I am anxious to persuade him that our figures add up. Nor would it be a mad world if we had a Liberal Government. It would be a saner world.

Our policy on CO_2 is for a 30 per cent. cut by the year 2005, compared with the Labour party's commitment of stabilisation by the year 2000. The Minister is right to say that our commitment on the nuclear industry must be dovetailed into that. It is about not building any more nuclear stations, including Sizewell B and so on. The Minister is right to say that one must marry together the timetable pre and post 2005 with the next deadline of 2020. A substantial reduction in nuclear capacity would have to come between 2005 and 2020, when some of the present power stations come off stream.

I shall be delighted at any time to go through the figures with the Minister. Our advice is that they add up and that what we wish to achieve is possible—that is, if the Government are persuaded, as I think they may be, of the less important use of nuclear power when, in 1994, that subject is reviewed by the Department of Energy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for not giving way. I shall, as the Minister would say, answer any of their queries in writing if they care to put them to me.

The next priority for the Government should be transport. Many actions could be taken by them to make the nation's transport policies more compatible and environmentally sustainable. Some obvious ones include removing the remaining advantages applying to company cars, graduating vehicle excise duty to provide an incentive to vehicles which are most environmentally beneficial, introducing an energy tax, and examining Department of Health research into the link between health or poor health and pollution by vehicles. The Government could then take action to reduce traffic congestion in urban areas.

Many of those matters are already on the Government's agenda, but they involve road pricing policy, more pedestrianisation, more investment in public transport, and a reduction in the road building programme. The crucial test after that would affect areas such as Oxleas wood, parts of the M3 and not ploughing up some of the most important areas of the countryside for roads that could be constructed differently.

The Minister referred to recycling, in many areas of which we lag far behind the European Community average. We are not good on paper and cardboard, although we are better than some on recycling cans and other objects. On glass we are among the worst in Europe. There are many ways in which we could improve our recycling record. The Government have the target of 50 per cent. of materials recycled by the end of the decade, but we are not on target to achieve that. We must do more if that target is to be achieved.

As a country we have made a start to being environmentally more responsible, and the Government have made their contribution to that. They could have achieved much more, more quickly and more effectively. I hope that today's debate will help to encourage a speedier and tougher response in the years ahead by this Government or whichever Government follow them.

12.34 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): We are fortunate to have this valuable debate today. I am glad to have been able to hear my hon. Friend the Minister's speech, and especially glad to have heard the powerful speech of the Chairman of the all-party Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), whose knowledge is profound and probably unequalled by any of us other than the Minister.

The problem with debating the environment is that it really concerns quality of life. We must be careful not to identify it as a new religion, because it is nothing but an

uprush of fear designed to dragoon people into following causes, sometimes for monetary reasons. After all, we are simply discussing the proper and wholesome care for the world in which we live. There is no need for it to become a turquoise vision, such as Mr. Icke claiming that he is the son of God. Neither is there a need to join some of the pressure groups that make unsustainable claims about concerns that are not real.

When I was a child I remember an elderly lady saying that the advance of television aerials would deplete the world of oxygen. She was very old when the television was invented. None the less, her claim was similar to the claim that was made by the Parents for Safe Food Campaign —a body of well known, publicly spirited women such as actresses and other public figures—that apples treated with a preservative called Alar will cause cancer. There is no causal link whatever, yet that pressurised campaign misled many housewives into not buying that invaluable food—the apple—for many months. The campaign has now moved on to pounding other foodstuffs. The campaign's success demonstrates the growing membership of quality of life organisations. I call that "greenness in a non-politicised arena". There are great health consequences from some of their actions.

The biggest industry in Devon, in which my constituency lies, is tourism. People come to us because they enjoy the quality of life that we offer—a true greenness. We have many sites of special scientific interest, for example the trail of Tarka the otter. The river and riverside walks around which the "Tarka the Otter" book was written have been identified as SSSIs and cleaned up. We also have the North Wyke Agricultural Research centre, which is carrying out serious and well-funded scientific research into low input grasslands. That is a good example of research which the Chairman of the all-party Select Committee identified as a long-term investment with no immediate return but with highly beneficial consequences to us all if the research proves positive. Indeed, it is already proving positive because low input grasslands research means high output in terms of more sheepmeat and higher quality lambs with the minimum input of potentially toxic substances.

It is worthwhile reminding hon. Members that farmers are the stewards of the countryside and the natural guardians of our common heritage. Today's great green movements build on what farmers have achieved for centuries. Many other hon. Members who are fortunate enough to represent rural constituencies see the fears and worries of those who come to live in our areas. For example, they want wind farms. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke of sustainable forms of energy and wind farms are one such possibility. However, in a densely populated island such as the United Kingdom, wind farms are enormously noisy and visually intrusive. In Scandinavia there are beautiful, sparsely architecturally designed modern windmills in profusion. They make a noise like a tractor farming and harvesting a field all day. It is an intense, tractor engine-like noise, which people do not like.

There are also worries about incinerators, particularly those to incinerate carcasses infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy. At Whiddon Down there is enormous concern that such an incinerator may have to be built

I received a letter from some people who moved into a beautiful village and bought a house overlooking a green field. The farmer ploughed it up and planted rape, and the newcomers wrote to me to complain that their view was now yellow, not green.

Such small factors that matter so much locally identify the natural conflict that exists between greenery and growth. That conflict can be seen in this week's announcement that car production is currently depressed due to economic factors in the United Kingdom. We should want fewer cars if we truly support the environment because cars cannot help but pollute, even when they use lead-free petrol, and they force us to create more roads.

It is difficult to get the priorities right, which is perhaps why the British electorate have now turned their attention away from Green party politics. The electorate have noticed that if the Green party had its way politically, there would be no electorate as that party's underlying ethos is that people pollute. Therefore, the logical conclusion must be that there should be no human reproduction, hence no electorate. Having identified its policy and seen the reaction of the electorate who, if the Green party had its way, would disappear, the Green party realised the logical conclusion of its policy and rapidly withdrew it from its manifesto.

Poverty, dirt and squalor are inescapable partners, so the first commitment to the environment has to be economic growth. The country has to be well off for us to be able to clean up after ourselves. I am delighted that the Conservative party committed itself first to economic growth and then, a little later as the economic growth started to boom in the 1980s, decided to dedicate itself to the environment.

However, we still have to answer the question as to who pays. The central tenet of Conservative policy is that the polluter pays. I have always been concerned that roads in the United Kingdom have traditionally been a free resource. When other countries began to introduce toll motorways, we did not. I am glad that Transport Ministers are now committing themselves, however gently—it is traumatic and difficult—to the prospect of private toll roads, and to debating whether we could charge people for coming into the most crowded districts, including central London.

I was fortunate to be present when various pieces of water legislation were discussed. I learnt of the Government's fine track record. Britain's water prices are among the lowest in Europe, and likely to remain so. All the water that an average United Kingdom citizen needs for drinking, cleaning, cooking, washing and gardening still costs only 15p a day. That makes nonsense of so many of the speeches of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who has now left the Chamber—I am sure temporarily—during the passage of the Water Bill. She made claims about the degradation of our water supplies and the extra costs that consumers would have to bear.

Water privatisation has brought vast benefits to the environment and the consumer. As a result, the record £28 billion, to which the Minister referred and which is to be spent over the next decade on water infrastructure, will be critical to ensure that the cleanliness of our water supply remains the best possible and at the upper end of the scale of water available in Europe. In my constituency, we have a long history of underinvestment. Major investment is now being made, especially in the Bideford area, where there are some remarkably beautiful estuarial waters which have been allowed to degrade because of underinvestment.

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

I am sorry that the Labour party has committed itself to renationalisation of the water industry. There is hypocrisy in its saying that it would do that at lower prices to shareholders at a time when it claims to be the party of the City and the party which backs the free market. It is not even able to say that it is offering renationalisation at a cost of £3 billion and would remove the £28 billion privately funded investment programme over 10 years. It would leave all those who have invested in the water industry with a pay-out of a lower value than that at which they bought their shares.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The hon. Lady has repeated what her hon. Friends have said. She has talked about the nationalised water industry and the renationalisation of the water industry. The water industry was never nationalised. It was run by municipalities or by statutory water companies acting as public utilities. We do not intend to turn the water industry into a national industry. It is well known that we intend initially to improve the regulatory aspects of the Government and of the environment protection executive towards the water industry and ultimately, water and sewerage services will be provided through the regional authorities that we plan to introduce. That will be at a far later stage. The change will be similar to the changes that we propose for transport, which will allow private investment to continue.

Miss Nicholson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for attempting to clarify the murky policies of his party. I remind him that the Labour party halved investment in sewerage and sewage disposal. I have little belief that any clear thinking on the matter will come from Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. There are vast difficulties. The Opposition want to support the free market because they see the benefits that the Conservative party has introduced, but they have to go back to the trade union movement and to central control.

I do not see any real difference between saying that one will renationalise something and control it by public expenditure rounds and saying that one will bring it under public expenditure control, but run it through the regions. Surely that is merely another layering of major responsibilities. I say that with feeling because the proposals for women, with which I will not bother the House this morning, involve layer on layer of interference in private lives and in the way in which we all wish to work.

Only the Conservative party can genuinely privatise and pull back state control. The result of privatisation is readily visible to all of us in terms of private investment. We have taken investment out of the milk round and away from the Treasury which faces pressures over hip replacements, hospitals, pensioners and all the rest of it. We have created genuine private investment. I can see no way in which the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) can claim that he would allow private investment in view of the huge overseeing structure that the Labour party would create. It is nationalisation, although Labour does not wish to use that word because it is so unpopular with the electorate.

Labour is not a green party committed to green policies. Its environmental policies are shallow, like weeds with shallow roots which are easily plucked and wither and die. Jonathon Porritt, that noted environmentalist, said on 23 March about the Labour party and environmental issues:

"Most Labour candidates will sound more than a little stilted on environmental issues for the greenery still does not come naturally—and it certainly does not come coherently."

As we have heard in the debate, that is true.

According to another Labour party Front-Bench spokesman a Labour Government would take action to regulate the water industry. That would reduce the profitability of the privatised water companies and would therefore be likely to depress the share price. Investors should take account of that. It is a different proposal from that of the Conservative party. Labour's environmental spokesman has said:

"We are traditionally seen as a producerist party, always giving priority to jobs and to pay packets rather than to environmental concerns."

The Times said:

"The Labour party document 'an Earthly Chance' is disfigured by Labour's own bugbears—bureaucracy and union power. Enacted in its entirety, Labour's policy would do little for the environment at great cost."

I am delighted that the Minister has put so much before the House. I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister's speech last week because it showed that the United Kingdom leads the way in making further great moves in the European and international context of the quality of life. I support the environmental agency and look forward to further moves by the Conservative Government.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Before we make further progress, I must repeat that which the House already knows, that the Chair has no authority to control the length of speeches. So far this morning Front-Bench Members have taken not less than 40 minutes and, with the exception of the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), Back-Bench Members have taken no less than 30 minutes. If everyone who wishes to speak is to be called in the debate hon. Members should remember that they are stewards of their own destiny and should act accordingly.

12.53 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. It is a pity that it is the only such debate in this Session and that it is being held on a Friday rather than on a day earlier in the week. I was pleased at the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday about setting up an environmental protection agency. The need for such an independent agency was put by the Select Committee on the Environment, the Labour party and the minority parties. The argument was also advanced last year in the Standing Committee on the Environmental Protection Bill and it has also been put time and again in the House. Such an agency was not proposed in the White Paper in September, but people are delighted that at the last minute, as a kind of death-bed conversion, the Government have decided to set up such an agency.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with that. The White Paper said that it would be considered. Would he mind apologising?

Mr. Williams: I meant that there was no commitment in the White Paper or at any stage last year or over the years

by the Government. However, as we prepare for a general election the Government have found that their green cupboard is relatively bare and have plucked a proposal from our manifesto and now try to dress it up as an environmental protection agency. We welcome the Government's commitment—if they are returned to office which I doubt—to set up an environmental protection body. What role will the National Rivers Authority play in the new body? There is serious concern that the NRA will be split up and that only the part responsible for pollution control will be transferred into the environmental protection agency. The Labour party is pleased that, since its establishment, the NRA has shown itself to be a watchdog with real teeth. It is a success story for the Government and we want it to be transferred lock, stock and barrel, into the agency. Will the NRA be transferred in full or fragmented? If it is fragmented, it will be weakened, which will have an effect on what would otherwise be the strongest EPA in Europe.

I hope that when the EPA is set up—I trust that that will be done by a Labour Government—it will take responsibility for all solid waste disposal, particularly toxic waste. Solid, liquid and gaseous effluents would then be under its control. I should like it to take over the responsibilities of the Countryside Commission and some responsibility for agriculture, because that involves environmental protection. I should like it to go further and take over energy efficiency which is a critical part of environmental protection. There may even be some elements of transport policy into which the EPA should have a strong input.

We want a robust, independent and well-financed EPA. To help to finance it, we could have green taxes—not just charges as in integrated pollution control. We want more than the charges for monitoring. We want pollution taxes, to give companies an incentive to pump out less effluent. We could also have landfill taxes. When companies or individuals are prosecuted for pollution, any fines levied could be payable to the EPA. That would give the agency an incentive to prosecute more. We want more vigorous law enforcement.

A critical part of the new agency is its independence from the Government. Here, there is a marked difference between our proposals and those of the Government. We propose a two-tier structure—an executive and a commission. The executive will be responsible for day-to-day policing, monitoring and prosecution of polluters, while the commission will be accountable to the Government. In that way, environmental protection will be at arm's length from the Government. That independence from Governments is important if the agency is to prove effective.

The danger with the Government's proposals is that the EPA will be part of the Department of the Environment and therefore subject to ministerial interference. The day after the Prime Minister made his speech, we saw the result of such interference. Our foremost nature conservationist, Sir Frederick Holliday, resigned as chairman of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. It is clear from the press reports and his comments yesterday on "The World at One" why he resigned. He was unhappy about clause 11 of the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill and the fact that he was not brought into the consultations on the moves to undermine the power of the new body that the Bill sets up. We do not want such interference in the EPA when it is set up. That is why the Labour party's proposals of a commission and an executive will ensure a more effective protection body and a better guarantee of its independence.

In our debate today, all hon. Members are aware of the Government's White Paper published in September last year. After months of publicity, we looked forward to something robust and meaningful. Instead, we got 300 pages of glossy pictures, with lots of exhortation and encouragement but very little by way of firm action. That applies to the Government's record throughout the last 10 to 12 years. Their only major environmental measure was last year's green Bill.

I was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Bill. I enjoyed its proceedings, but throughout I realised that the Bill was pretty small beer. It deals with important matters such as integrated pollution control, litter, waste collection, recycling and so on, but the financial provision for the implementation of those measures is only £30 million. That was the value placed by the Government on cleaning up the environment.

That figure must be compared with what is done in the United States. On 8 March 1991 *Science* carried an article on the costs of cleaning up the environment. It says:

"The United States spent $115 billion in current dollars on cleaning up pollution in 1990. That's about 40% of the defense budget and just over 2% of the gross national product. And if a new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report is correct, by the year 2000 the total will climb to $171 billion to $185 billion."

That is about 2·7 per cent. of the United States gross domestic product. Compared with the $115 billion spent last year by the United States, our little green Bill commitment amounted to only £30 million—a factor difference of 1,000. That is a measure of the priority given by this Government to cleaning up the environment.

When the Government eventually pluck up the courage to face the electorate—let us hope later this year—they will be judged not on today's debate, or on the Prime Minister's speech last Monday, or even on last year's White Paper, but on their record over the last 12 years. Their record does not stand up to scrutiny.

The water industry has been mentioned several times. The Government regularly under-invested in water during the 1980s. Their only policy was to privatise. Privatisation has led to higher bills and much greater salaries for the chairmen of the water companies. However, the quality of our drinking water is lower now than it was in 1979. The pollution of beaches by sewage effluent is worse now than it was 10 or 12 years ago. We await the benefits of any environmental improvements that the Government have set in hand.

As for agriculture, this is a critical year for the future of the common agricultural policy. It has caused extreme destruction of the environment. Hedgerows have been dug up. Farmers have engaged in intensive agricultural methods and used more fertilisers, pesticides and chemicals, which cause pollution.

The MacSharry proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy mean that when the deep cuts come the big farmers will suffer. They enjoy 80 per cent. of the benefits of the CAP. What do the Government say about the proposals? They are hostile to them, simply because they will hit the big farmers. I agree with MacSharry that small farmers should be protected for both social and environmental reasons. Their style of

[Mr. Williams]

farming is much more environmentally friendly. However, the Government are very much in the pockets of the big farmers—the agri-business lobby.

The Labour party wants the small farmers to survive and much more emphasis to be placed on environmental protection. Instead of the CAP supporting increased agricultural production, leading to massive surpluses of food, it should concentrate on environmental protection —the green premium, as we describe it.

The Government's record on transport is clear. They have projected an increase of 142 per cent. in traffic over the next 35 years. That increase is ludicrous. The Government are clearly the big car party. They invest £500 million a year in British Rail and public transport, compared with £3 billion a year in France and Italy and £4,000 million in Germany. The Government's emphasis is completely wrong.

The Government's record on energy is wide open to attack. I was a member of the Standing Committee which considered the Electricity Bill two years ago. We were completely hostile to its main proposal to privatise electricity. At every stage during the Bill's passage, we tried to move amendments to introduce energy efficiency. Our main proposal was for least-cost planning.

Least-cost planning is followed in the United States. The regulators of American power utilities must demonstrate to the regulator when they propose to build a new power station that the power station is necessary and that the money could not be better invested in home insulation. Instead of building a new power station for £1,000 million, it would be better to invest that money in home insulation and district heating schemes. About seven times as much energy would be saved pro rata as would be generated with the same amount of money. The Government turned down all our amendments about least-cost planning.

Great savings can be made with energy efficiency. The Minister had great difficulty earlier with my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) in accepting that major savings are possible through energy efficiency. An article appeared in the *New Scientist* a couple of years ago which referred to the record in the United States from 1973—the onset of the oil crisis—to 1986. It stated:

"In the United States . . . the annual demand for energy is still below that of 1973 even though the country's gross domestic product . . . is up by 40 per cent."

Over that 13-year period there was a 40 per cent. growth in GDP and a cut in energy demand. The article continued:

"Japan has gone one better. The country used 6 per cent. less energy in 1986 than it did in 1973 even though its GDP grew by 46 per cent. over the 15 years."

It used 6 per cent. less energy while its GDP grew by 46 per cent. That is a 50 per cent. increase in energy efficiency over the period. Those are not the findings of an abstract scientist or the results of a feasibility study; that is the record achieved by advanced countries comparable to ours. Compared to them, we are at the bottom of the league.

That article in the *New Scientist* also stated:

"The International Energy Agency estimates that if energy conservation measures that are now economically viable were fully implemented by the year 2000, energy efficiency would be more than 30 per cent. higher than current levels."

This Government have cut the Energy Efficiency Office's budget. There has been much exhortation, but the Government have not got their hands dirty in terms of doing anything.

There is quite a lot of opencast coal mining in my constituency. That is wildly and widely unpopular. Under this Government, opencast coal production has increased from 12·9 million tonnes in 1979 to 18·9 million tonnes in 1989. That is a 50 per cent. increase in production. Nothing can be more environmentally destructive than opencast mining. There is a presumption in favour of such development in the mineral planning guidance notes. Labour will reverse that when we are in government.

Coal as a source of energy is much discredited, because it is dirty and sooty. However, clean coal combustion is now possible. The Government are aware of that, but they do not believe in investing in it. In the 1970s, in Grimethorpe, Yorkshire, fluidised bed combustion was developed. It was possible to remove all sulphur in that way, but scientists working at Grimethorpe are now going overseas because that British technology is being developed overseas.

Last Monday, at *The Sunday Times* exhibition at Olympia, I talked to someone involved in research into the topping cycle. He explained the background in some detail and spoke of his personal frustration in not getting sufficient support from the Department of Energy. That technology will be the main method of electricity production in the next century. The biggest resource is coal —not nuclear power, oil or gas. In the next century, electricity will be made from clean coal combustion, despite the carbon dioxide. Unfortunately, we are in that no-win situation. It will be clean coal combustion.

Acid rain is no longer one of the environmental glamour issues, but it is a serious problem. In my constituency, thin soils cannot buffer acidity in the rainfall. In Wales, the Lake District, Scotland, and Scandinavia there are serious problems of acid rain poisoning our rivers, leaching aluminium into our rivers and drinking waters, with its relationship to Alzheimer's disease and so on.

Belatedly, in 1987, the Government recognised that acid rain was a problem. They undertook to agree to the European Community's directive to introduce cuts in sulphur dioxide emissions, but, when faced with the privatisation of the electricity industry, what did they do? They reneged on those commitments and cut by a third the number of power stations to be installed with flue gas desulphurisation equipment. The awful fact is that when the Government leave office, not one of our power stations will have FGD equipment. We must compare that with Germany, Holland, Austria and Sweden, where virtually all power stations have FGD equipment. When the election comes, the "dirty man of Europe" tag will fit the Government.

1.11 pm

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): The parrot cries of energy efficiency from the Opposition Benches remind me irresistibly of the war cry of the Wilson Government—the white heat of technical revolution that was going to save

their bacon in 1969 and 1970. It creates a wonderful picture of the Labour party being as credible as double-glazing salesmen.

I refer to the contribution that the motor industry wishes to make to the improvement of the environment. I pause only to note the deep-seated hostility of the Labour and Liberal parties to the motor car and the motorist, despite the fact that 30 million people hold driving licences and there are 22 million cars on the road. I have no doubt of the consequences of that if it were followed to its logical conclusion.

I welcome the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the start of this week, following the Department of Transport paper on the environment. My right hon. Friend set out clearly some of the major considerations: that climate change is a global problem, but that the United Kingdom is responsible for only 3 per cent. of global emissions of carbon dioxide; that road transport in the United Kingdom is responsible for less than a fifth of that 3 per cent; the largest polluters are the power stations that are so beloved of the Labour party; and that businesses, industries, the motor car and other road transport are hotly pursued by domestic central heating as a source of carbon dioxide emissions. We need to get the matter into perspective.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will chair the strategy committee. He also pointed out that one of our main aims must be to work with the market and to awaken individuals to their responsibilities in improving the environment. My right hon. Friend mentioned four subjects. I welcome the fact that two of them were energy saving and transport, about which I wish to speak. In his paper, my right hon and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport referred to the need to give market signals and to provide information, to the role of regulation and to the provision of infrastructure.

There is a balance to be struck in all these matters. If we are considering emissions from motor vehicles, it is important to note that there is a difference between a cleaner engine and a cooler engine—the cooler engine being the one that gives off less CO_2 and contributes less to global warming. The catalyst helps to clean up other emissions, but leads to further emissions of CO_2 and thus militates against efforts to reduce global warming. As I have said, there is a balance to be struck. We are trying to achieve a cleaner, cooler, quieter and safer vehicle. For the cleaner vehicle, which cleans up emissions other than CO_2, great progress has already been made with unleaded petrol, the fitting of catalytic converters and by doing away with the use of chlorofluorocarbons in motor vehicles. However, further progress could be made with the greater use of diesel engines, which are more economical, more energy efficient and give off less CO_2. They could therefore make an important contribution to reducing global warming.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) and I have been going around Government Departments for nearly two years outlining a programme whereby the motor industry would contribute towards the achievement of the stated target of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) of maintaining CO_2 emissions at their current level until 2005. It is a matter of regret that in the Budget the Government did not pursue the advantages of the proposals that my hon. Friend sought to introduce as amendments to the Finance Bill. I hope that our further amendment may be selected for consideration next week.

I much admired, as well as enjoyed, the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, but must advise him that the motor industry wants identified targets towards which it can work. If we have targets for energy efficiency and for emissions—as are being introduced in the EEC—and for noise and for safety, a programme of manufacture can be developed so that we can work towards those ends. My hon. Friend the Member for Northfield and I would argue that we should go down the route of market signal and incentive, as we did so successfully for unleaded petrol. We have been urging similar incentives for diesel, which would not only reduce its price in this country and bring it closer to the price elsewhere on the continent where the advantages of economy are already well understood, but would help our hard-pressed industry in this time of recession.

There have been some cheap jibes, notably in the literature of the green parties, about company cars, which have been mentioned this morning. I regretted to note a similar reference in the Department of Transport's White Paper. If we examine the facts, we find that the measures that were introduced in the Budget have increased the tax for employees while leaving their bosses with a lower level of tax. According to the Inland Revenue's own figures, more company cars are owned by people on schedule D than are used by those on schedule E. So once more the employees are paying higher tax than those who employ them.

There is also an argument about the arm's-length cost of the company car, as established by the contract hire rate. We also ignore the fact that company cars are newer and better maintained. The quickest way to make improvements is to bring new vehicles into the vehicle park. Otherwise, it will take at least 10 years to work through the 22 million vehicles which are currently on the road and ensure that they are all fitted with a catalyst to achieve the improvements that we all want. One way of helping to speed up that process is to encourage a greater turnover of vehicles and get new vehicles on the road. We must get rid of the 2 million unlicensed vehicles and the innumerable badly maintained vehicles which are the greatest polluters, as well as the noisiest and unsafest vehicles of the lot.

I hope that a stricter MOT standard will be introduced. I hope that we shall not only move immediately to four gas testing, which I was discussing with the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) earlier, but introduce calibration of equipment and standard of workshop and additional safety and noise requirements.

Noise is an important polluter. I have a warning for my hon. Friend the Minister from a constituency factory which is interested in the production of axle load indicators. It has advised me this week that the EEC legislation is moving towards adopting overall payload rather than axle weight. Yet we have always been given to understand that it is axle weight which is so damaging to our road structure and so influential on noise levels.

Time does not permit me to make all the remarks that I had prepared, so I must come to a conclusion to allow my colleagues to take part in the debate. The quality of the environment is an important freedom for us all. When I took my young son swimming in the river two summers ago, I suddenly realised that it was an unusual experience

[Sir Hal Miller]

for him, whereas I was taught to swim in the river. Both the schools that I attended took us swimming in the river. I hope that my son and my grandchildren will also in due course be able to swim safely in the river.

The motor industry is anxious and willing to make its contribution to improving the environment for all of us, as well as giving us the advantages of mobility and security. Security is important for mothers on the school run or women travelling late at night who do not feel safe on public transport. It is an important issue. We are willing to make that contribution. We ask that targets be set and that research should be conducted into new technologies, including alternative fuels. What is the point of concentrating all our attention on what comes out of the exhaust instead of what goes into the engine in the first place? We welcome the White Paper and the fact that there will be a report, and we look forward to making our contribution.

1.23 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the opportunity to discuss green issues, but I regret that this has been such a wide-ranging debate, because it is not easy to comment on some of the issues raised.

In the past three months, I have been fortunate enough to visit the constituencies of Stroud, Salisbury, Exeter, Falmouth and Camborne, Teignbridge, Suffolk, Coastal and Waveney at the invitation of prospective Labour candidates. I have spoken to the various environmental groups in those areas as well as to footpath officers, conservationists, representatives of the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and others about the Labour party policies contained in our document, "Earthly Chance". We discussed problems such as access to the countryside and how we can maintain the quality of the countryside. Those meetings were constructive and useful and I was pleased at the number of people who were excited by the proposals in the Labour party document.

The consensus that emerged from those meetings was one of concern about farm incomes and the difficulty that is placed on those who are required to maintain our countryside in the neatly farmed way which we have come to accept and enjoy. People were extremely interested in the Labour party's policy of green premiums.

During my campaign I was pleased to note that the Government announced their country stewardship scheme, because it looks as though the Government are following the Labour party. They have now recognised that we must find ways in which we can assist farmers to protect and maintain the countryside. We should not pay farmers just to undertake more and more food production.

I am concerned, however, that the Government are putting up only £13 million for the country stewardship scheme. On Wednesday, I gathered from the Secretary of State for the Environment that the money will be spread over three years and that it will be administered by the Countryside Commission.

I am pleased that the DOE has taken an initiative on the countryside, but it is important to compare it with the negative response to the set-aside scheme, which was proposed by the European Community and is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Have we got the balance right? I plead with the Government to expand the country stewardship scheme. Perhaps they should hand it over to MAFF to administer, but the principles set by the DOE should be retained so that we can do much more to protect the incomes of those in the countryside. We are talking not just about farmers' income, but about that of farmworkers and those in the neighbourhood who provide support services. I urge the Minister to consider the scheme to see how some of the money from the EC for the set-aside scheme can be used in a more positive way to develop and protect the countryside.

We must do much more positive work to protect the hedgerows. I am delighted that the Government have stopped giving grants to people to tear up the hedgerows, but I still regret that too many hedgerows are disappearing through neglect. They must be properly maintained and, after 30 years, they need to be properly layed. Throughout my visits, it became the exception rather than the rule to see a well-layed hedge.

I am absolutely appalled at the amount of litter we see. It is not a question whether an authority is Labour controlled, because most authorities have an appalling litter problem. I welcome the Environmental Protection Act 1990 although I am not certain whether the Government have got it right. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will tell us when the provisions on litter contained in that Act will come into operation. When will on-the-spot fines be introduced? When will individuals be able to take local authorities to court if they fail to deliver the goods?

I do not blame local authorities entirely for the litter problem. The fact is that people still drop too much litter. Unfortunately, people are schizophrenic in their attitude to litter. When I visit schools, the pupils are terribly enthusiastic about green issues. The are concerned not just about the rain forests and the whale, but about the problems of littter. There may be huge posters about litter, but when I leave those schools I often see a trail of sweet papers and ice-cream wrappers.

We must convince people that litter is everybody's problem.

I am concerned about the problems in the Tameside and Stockport areas of my constituency, where the litter collection service is a disgrace. Tameside has continually said that it does not have the money to do it and is looking for ways to improve the service. I fear that, so far, it has not succeeded in achieving any improvement.

On the other hand, Stockport fully embraced the Government approach and privatised its refuse and litter collection services. It worked on the basis that, as the Government had claimed, if it privatised the services, the work would be done more cheaply and with better quality. Despite what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said about the great Liberal green policies, the response of the Liberals in Stockport, where they comprise the largest party on the council, has been a disaster.

The Government's policy was followed, the services were put out to tender and a bid was accepted from Focsa, a Spanish company, which was to carry out the refuse and litter services. Leaflets were distributed to all households

stating that there would be a better service. In the event, the service has been far worse, and I have had to contact chief officers about sites not being cleaned up properly.

The local authority discovered that it had made a mess by letting the tender to Focsa because some streets had not even been included in the tender. The company had put in a low bid simply to get the business, hoping that in the future it could put the price up. The authority is now faced with having to decide whether to withdraw the contract from the company and, if so, whether it would then be possible to find another company to provide a service at the right price. At present, litter collection there is a disgrace and it is time that the Liberal-dominated council sorted the matter out.

The Minister referred briefly to the issue of green labels, but I was disappointed with what he said. He repeated the promise that we have often heard in the House—it was stated in an Adjournment debate of mine last March—that it was hoped to have a scheme in place by 1 January.

Mr. Trippier: I had to cover many subjects in my speech and could not spend long on that one. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am satisfied, having attended the last meeting of the Environment Council in Europe, that the eco-labelling directive will come out of the next Council meeting in October or, at the latest, in December of this year.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister promised that a scheme would be in operation by January. If that is to happen, manufacturers must be told in September or October what to state on the packets, depending on the products and how long it takes to produce them and get them to the shops. I hope that the scheme will be in operation quickly. The longer the delay, the more people are conned, as he suggested, by buying products that are claimed to be environmentally friendly when they are not. Much good will is lost in that way.

I like the idea of waste disposal credits. It makes sense to encourage people to recycle material rather than use it to fill up holes in the ground. But a problem exists between the collection and disposal authorities. If credits are given to collection authorities, they remove various items, but the disposal authorities take out the same items, so the two are working in opposition directions.

Greater Manchester waste disposal authority is working hard to extract tin cans, but becomes concerned when the volume of cans in the refuse falls below a certain level because it is then not worth while to run all the refuse through the magnets and so on to remove the cans.

North West Water plc and Tameside local authority —two totally different organisations—have great charters about green issues. North West Water says how environmentally friendly it is, and explains how it has tackled certain problems and how it wants to encourage access to the countryside. The trouble is that trees are cut down to produce those documents on green issues, but when it comes to specific cases neither the local authority nor the water company takes a blind bit of notice.

I am delighted that the Secretary of State has called for an inquiry into the Kingswater development. I hope that the inspector will find in favour of the local residents, who do not want one of the nicest areas of open space between Manchester and Tameside to be destroyed by a business park. A problem has developed in the past couple of weeks. The local authority considered the planning application in the autumn and in January the Secretary of State called for an inquiry—it is now set for 12 September. The local authority's Queen's Counsel has now told the local authority that it is in a mess, because it has no concrete proposals for road access to the site and he has recommended that North West Water should ask for the inquiry to be delayed for six months. The Tameside officials do not want such a delay and are now trying to rush through a road proposal, which was due to be announced yesterday or today. People will have 28 days to object to it, and a local authority meeting will be held to discuss it sometime towards the end of August. The local authority could then simply tell the inspector on 12 September that there is a concrete road proposal. The road proposal reverses a decision made by the inspector on the proposals for a motorway in my constituency. I hope that the Minister will consider the matter carefully and tell Tameside that it is not good enough to try to rush the road access proposal through in two months at the most, in preparation for the public inquiry. If local people are to be consulted effectively, the public inquiry on the Kingswater development should be postponed for six months. The road issue and the subject of the inquiry could then be properly considered so that proper local debate on the issue could take place. I shall write to the Minister in a little more detail on that subject.

The Government must get on with turning some of their rhetoric on green issues into practice. They must set out to make the country stewardship scheme work so that much more money is spent on conservation rather than merely on food production. We must have effective action on litter, because it is an absolute disgrace. A working system of green labelling should be in place by 1 January. Finally, we must do much more to ensure that we do not continue to tip natural resources into holes in the ground, because we may have to dig them out in the future. I welcome the opportunity for a debate on green issues, but I wish that the House had more time to discuss them today and more opportunities to return to them.

1.38 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): About five years ago, having spent almost a lifetime in personnel work, I put my name forward to become a member of the Employment Select Committee. For some reason I was overlooked, so I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) why. He told me not to worry because there was a vacancy on the Environment Committee—which also begins with an E. My membership of that Committee was my introduction to the subject. The past five years have been thoroughly exciting and interesting, and I pay tribute to the Chairman of the Committee for the work that he has done in those five years to bring so many issues to the public's attention. Many of them are commonplace today, but were then rare and novel—for example, acid rain and other subjects that we were supposed to have debated this morning but which have not been mentioned. I can understand why as it is difficult to isolate the environment in the United Kingdom from that in the rest of the world. That is one fact that we have discovered from our work on the Select Committee during the past five years or more.

The reports before us have some element of criticism of the Government, some suggestions and some positive points that may be controversial. But every one of our reports has come out with the unanimous support for the

[Mr. Richard Holt]

composition of the Committees. The manpower changes in those Committees has been quite high, particularly among Labour Members, as more and more of them are promoted to become Opposition spokesmen and women. None of the reports has come out with a minority view. That means that we have sought to put the environment above party politics, and we must continue to do so.

Therefore, I was disappointed—although perhaps I should not have been surprised—by the speech of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), which was nothing more than a catalogue of carping comments, with selective statistics, and which did nothing to elevate the debate or introduce any constructive proposals. That is not the way that we try to do things on the Select Committees.

I always make a wry note of the fact that, because of the way this place works, the Liberal party, from which there is never anyone present at Select Committee meetings, is always offered an early and long bite of the cherry in debates in the Chamber, despite the fact that Liberal Members show no interest in the subject in the House. If someone has to go to a funeral, it is not beyond the wit of man to find someone else to sit in and participate in a debate. However, Liberal Members do not do so, and there is a void in the Chamber and on the Select Committee. That may not be entirely the fault of the Liberal party; it may be partly due to the way in which Select Committees are chosen. The Select Committee on the Environment is a public Committee to which anyone can come, but, to my knowledge, during the five years in which I have served the Committee, not once has a Liberal party observer been present or taken any interest in anything that we have done.

Sir Hugh Rossi: May I set the record absolutely straight? There was a Liberal Member on the Select Committee of the Environment until 1985, when he was made Liberal Chief Whip and had to resign from the Committee. I asked for that place on the Committee to be kept open for the whole of one Parliament so that the Liberals could replace him, but no one could be found from among their ranks who was willing to serve. At the general election, the Labour party asked for and obtained that place.

Mr. Holt: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Committee, whose experience goes back even further than mine, for explaining the correct position.

We have heard talk about the terrible pollution on beaches, but it was not mentioned that the Select Committee has found that measuring equipment used today to determine whether the water contains pollutants is superior to that available 30 or 40 years ago. There is no doubt that, if today's equipment had been available then, we would have found that the beaches were worse in those days than they are today, but we have no way of recording that.

Last week we heard that the east Germans reckon that it will be 10 years before raw sewage is no longer spread around their beaches. We are a long way from that, and a long way ahead of the east Germans, but we still have more work to do.

Chlorofluorocarbons present a huge international problem. I asked an Indian Government official how the Indian Government would deal with the problem of refrigeration and CFCs in the Indian sub-continent, as more refrigerators were used there and as the people turned more to western standards. He said, "I challenge you to go up to an Indian peasant woman who has lived all her life with the wish to have a refrigerator and to tell her that she cannot have it because it will increase the CFCs in the atmosphere, although people in the west want to keep their refrigerators." When we spoke to the Brazilians about the tropical forests, they said that they did not have a problem of cutting down the forests. They said that the west had the problem of too many cars. They said that if we cut out our cars, they would not have a problem with the forests. Trying to introduce some rationale takes the whole debate on the environment outside normal party politics. We should consider the matter more objectively and constructively.

For the first time, we have a Government who have listened to what we have said and who have introduced some of the measures that we have proposed. It was interesting to note that, when we first said that we would investigate indoor pollution, the following week the Department of the Environment, for the first time, issued a circular on indoor pollution. That was a coincidence par excellence. It shows that the Department listened and it shows the value of the Select Committee and its reports.

I endorse the remark made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) about the Minister not mentioning Northern Ireland in his speech. It is an area of particular beauty and, as we saw when we went there, there are pollution problems that we should take on board.

I represent the chemical heart of England on Teesside. There are problems there of toxic waste and cleaning up. We have the new power station from Enron and gases come ashore there to create power. Close by, there is the Hartlepool nuclear power station. We are aware of all the pollution problems, and we are also aware that one cannot turn the clock back. We cannot say to people that they must not have this or that, because they have been used to turning on the switch to get electric light, and to having electricity for cooking and for all the other things that we take for granted. It all has a price which has to be paid in environmental and in financial terms. Getting the balance right is the most important job that the Government must tackle.

I listened to Opposition Members talking about polluted beaches. We have them in Durham. Why? We have coalfields there. Until this Government came to power, no Government had done anything about that. The problem has been recognised, time limits have been set, and something will be done. The churlishness of the Opposition in failing to give the Government recognition for that does their cause no good.

There is no doubt that the water industry was starved of cash under the 1974-79 Labour Government. I was a member of the Thames water board at the time and I know how difficult it was for us as a water authority to keep up with basic maintenance, let alone to carry out replacement and renovation. Everything in the ground was getting older, but could not be replaced or repaired.

It is a shame that we have had this debate on a Friday. It would have been a better debate if more Back-Bench Members had been able to make contributions. They would have been better than the nonsense that we heard from the hon. Member for Dewsbury. Some of her remarks do not deserve comment, but I want to mention

Friends of the the Earth. They are an irritant to many people, but they sometimes make good points. If we did not have them, we should have to invent them. Why not recognise that we have pressure groups? All of them have axes to grind and much of the time what they say will be of little consequence. However, occasionally they get it right. It would be good if the Government could occasionally say that the Opposition have a good point and that they accept it. It would be even better if the Opposition would occasionally say that they support the Government on an issue and that they understand the Government's problems. They should say that they understand that the problem of pollution has developed over decades and centuries. We should approach in a far less partisan way matters such as contaminated land for which no records exist.

I warn the Government not to place too much hope on Europe, because it will clearly make the wrong moves on eco labelling. European countries do not know what they want and are pulling in different directions. Consequently, we shall have to take matters into our own hands. I am sure that the Select Committee on the Environment will make recommendations on that important subject. Members on both Front Benches should agree on eco labelling, and we should not play party politics about whether a label will contain too little or too much. The public will have to trust such a label and we should agree on what it should contain.

The environment is and will continue to be a major issue. In a party speech my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said that we have only a leasehold on this earth. She was absolutely right. It is the Government's responsibility to make sure that environmental issues are properly treated, and it is the responsibility of Back Benchers to make sure that the Government do that. I look forward to another five years' service on the Select Committee, which is carrying out precisely that task.

1.53 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Not long ago, my journey from Birmingham to London took two and a half hours and the fuel consumption of the car that I then had was about six gallons. Now, the same journey takes just under two hours and my present car's fuel consumption is no more than two and a half gallons. The difference is due to the fact that the Government have completed the M40 motorway which has relieved congestion along an arduous and outdated route through Banbury and Oxford, causing pollution, congestion and heavy fuel consumption.

New roads and those that are being built have freed up traffic which is therefore not consuming as much fuel and, obviously, not causing as much pollution. The other significant reason for decreased fuel consumption is that I have changed my car. I now drive a diesel vehicle and I am reaping the benefits of a superior form of internal combustion engine which is more energy efficient and which provides the power and performance that I want.

Some differences between petrol and diesel cars are quite staggering. The touring economy of a car is obtained by taking the calculations of fuel consumption for the urban cycle, at 56 mph and at 75 mph and weighting them. Under that formula a car such as the Montego powered by a two-litre petrol engine has a fuel consumption of 35·4 miles per gallon. The diesel equivalent will accomplish 55·8 miles per gallon. That is an enormous increase and it is due to the ability of the diesel engine to squeeze extra energy out of every litre of fuel.

A bigger executive car such as the Rover 827 will deliver 26·6 miles to a gallon of petrol. Its diesel equivalent, the Rover 825, will cover 40·7 miles to the gallon. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) said some months ago, an alternative form of engine would enable us to make enormous strides in saving fuel and in reducing the output of carbon dioxide, which is a difficult gas to control. Of course there are other pollutants, but, because a diesel car can travel further on a gallon of fuel, it will cause much less pollution than its petrol equivalent.

The introduction of catalysts to solve the problem of exhaust emissions from petrol cars may be a good and sensible idea, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove pointed out, catalysts actually exacerbate the problem because those dangerous pollutants are turned to CO_2. Therefore, the vehicle not only goes less far on a gallon of fuel but emits further carbon dioxide.

It has been said that the wider use of diesel vehicles will lead to an increase in other forms of pollution—black smoke, soot on buildings, health hazards, particulate emissions—and that that is a further reason for not embracing the diesel car. However, despite long-standing research into the consequencies of diesel exhaust, there is no evidence that it is in any way carcinogenic. Although German and United States agencies, which are generally in the lead in research on exhaust emissions, have done an enormous amount of testing, no hidden problems have been discerned. I understand that a committee has been set up in this country, but I have been unable to ascertain who belongs to it or what findings it is establishing. Presumably, it is either duplicating experiments conducted elsewhere or developing new experiements.

Particulate emissions are a result of the sulphur content of the fuel used. The European Commission has announced that, by 1996, the sulphur content of fuel should be reduced to a low level. However, there is no national standard for sulphur contents in diesel fuel. The oil companies try to keep it to a reasonable level, but it tends to go up and down according to the refining process. The Government have encouraged the use of unleaded fuel, so it would be easy for them to impose a reduction of the sulphur content of diesel fuel at a far quicker rate. We should be moving as a European group of nations.

There is strong evidence that unleaded fuel, which is more accurately and highly refined than leaded fuel, contains more benzine than leaded fuel. Experiments in the United States have shown that this seems to have carcinogenic side effects on those who inhale the fumes when filling up their cars. Therefore, it is not the case that unleaded petrol has no side effects on health. There is some linkage there, although there is not on diesel fuel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove and I have had similar problems in our attempts to encourage the Government to introduce an incentive for the buying of diesel cars, along the line of the fiscal incentive to use unleaded fuel. If people were encouraged to buy diesel cars, it is possible that we would reduce CO_2 emissions by the year 2005, or even halt them at the present level. Unless we adopt a policy of incentives, there is little chance of the motor industry and the car user being able to play a part in reducing CO_2 emissions.

[Mr. Roger King]

The Government have many arguments about why no incentives should be offered. We have written to the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport—and to the Treasury, because it decides on tax concessions. I imagine that the Departments have consulted each other, so we end up with responses similar to the one from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury. She said in a letter to me:

"Diesel fuel, derv, contains roughly 14 per cent. more carbon per litre of fuel than petrol does, and thus generates correspondingly more carbon dioxide per litre consumed."

That is true, but it overlooks the fact that, for the same amount of fuel, a diesel car will go a lot further.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders—I assume that the House understands that it is well versed in these matters—says:

"Allowing for relative carbon content by volume of fuel, the fuel economy advantage of the diesel, up to 30 per cent. per litre per 100 kilometre term, translates into a CO_2 advantage in grams per kilometre of up to a 20 per cent. saving over a petrol equivalent."

Although the Treasury and Government Departments say that there is more carbon in diesel, the fact that the car travels further on diesel fuel wipes out the discrepancy and provides a 20 per cent. benefit. Diesel cars are more expensive to manufacture because they are more complex and robust. If, however, we can reduce both the price of diesel cars and the price of diesel fuel, the Government will be able to meet its road transport target by 2005.

If our amendment is selected on the Report stage of the Finance Bill, we hope to introduce a clause that will provide some latitude as regards the 10 per cent. special car tax. We shall concentrate on banding cars, based on their touring fuel consumption. I hope that the Government will consider carefully that interesting concept. Unless they encourage people to purchase fuel-efficient cars—and the only way to do that is through the wallet—they will never meet the target they have set themselves. As soon as the Government appreciate that fact and introduce financial incentives, the target will be met. The car industry will manufacture the products that it knows that it can make and that it wants to make, and that will be good for everyone.

2.1 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Both Opposition parties have a hang up about nuclear power. They always find a way round admitting that it is a very efficient means of generating electricity. However good our energy conservation measures may be, nuclear energy produces less carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide than power generated by fossil fuels. The sooner we get that message over, the better it will be for our energy policy.

I welcome the debate. I have always believed that we need to keep environmental issues at the forefront of political discussion. I shall concentrate on how local communities can improve their environment. Environmental improvement is not just a matter of the Government telling people what to do. It is up to individuals and organisations to get on with it themselves. That requires a considerable amount of explanation and objectivity on the part of local pressure groups and councillors.

I intend to give an example from my area to demonstrate how things can go right. It might provide a few lessons for the future. It will not be a complete surprise to hon. Members to hear that the coastline around Blackpool, near my constituency, needs to be cleaned up. Neglect over decades by North West Water was largely the result of lack of Government funding, particularly during the period when the Labour Government were in power between 1974 and 1979. In real terms, the amount spent on cleaning up the sewage around our coasts was reduced from £900 million in 1974 to £400 million in 1979.

It should also be noted that the local Labour party first became involved in environmental matters when the Labour-controlled Lancashire county council opposed a scheme to improve the quality of sewage disposal along the Fylde coast. The method suggested by North West Water was old-fashioned and inadequate, in my opinion, but I suspect that the county's opposition to it had much more to do with the imminent privatisation of the water industry than with any long-term concern for the environment.

I shall not detain hon. Members by describing the subsequent events, apart from saying that the Government rightly decided that the scheme was not good enough and asked North West Water to think again. In the intervening period, environmental awareness locally has increased tremendously, partly as a result of the environment becoming an important issue nationally, but also because local people began to discuss in detail the best way that the coastline could be cleaned up.

Over the past two years the political climate on the Fylde coast has also changed. We now have a Labour-controlled borough council in Blackpool and greater representation by the Labour party in Fleetwood. It will not surprise my colleagues to learn that Labour's view on environmental improvement matters has, as a result of those political changes, also changed. We now hear less about Blackpool's dirty beaches, and although Labour councillors in Fleetwood were largely elected on the basis of their opposition to the pipeline, they now face the possibility of the construction of a sewage works and a pipeline beside the town, both of which seem to have the approval of their Labour colleagues at county hall.

Therefore, it is not surprising that many people in Fleetwood feel betrayed by the Labour party which gave the distinct impression that it supported the town against organisations like North West Water which wanted to treat all Fylde's sewage by way of a long sea outfall or by a sewage plant near Fleetwood.

It is interesting to note that the county council now supports the present scheme. It would be no exaggeration to say that the Labour party locally is hopelessly split on the issue. County politicians want the sewage works to be built so that they can support their Labour colleagues in Blackpool borough. In doing that, they have ditched Fleetwood.

I make that point because it shows the difficulty with local environmental issues if they become bogged down in local politics. That is certainly what has happened in this case. We must ensure that in future environmental matters are dealt with on a slightly higher plain so that we can move forward and find the best solution from an environmental point of view.

The scheme on the Fylde coast needs further improvement. We must find ways to dispose of the sludge effectively. The Select Committee on the Environment—of which I was a member for many years—has said that incineration rather than landfill is the way forward. It is

also worth stating that landfill has problems because of the need to comply with the EEC directive on landfill sites that will come into force in 1997.

I very much support what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said recently about the creation of a new environmental protection agency. I should like it to be called the environmental improvement agency, because that it is what it is all about. It is important for the Government to create targets, for outside agencies to regulate and for everyone else, in the best way possible, to try to improve the environment individually as well as in groups.

2.7 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): We have had a long and interesting debate in which, unfortunately, because it has been so wide-ranging, we have not been able to consider in depth some very important subjects. It is also a pity that we could not have this debate until almost a year after the White Paper was published.

Perhaps the delay was due to the fact that the Government did not want to be reminded of the reaction of the press to the White Paper. Although most papers normally support the Government, the response of the press to the White Paper was lukewarm, to say the least. For example, one paper said that the White Paper contained 350 proposals with more conditions and caveats than an insurance policy. *The Times* described the White Paper as "a white flag" rather than a White Paper. *The Times* editorial stated that

"pressure for further improvements is more likely to come from Brussels than from Whitehall, a sad comment on the efficiency of National Sovereignty."

We were told also that it was a

"compendium of muted declarations of hesitant intent";

and that it set

"a floor below which it would be disastrous to sink."

Another paper said that it was

"as feeble as it is lengthy."

It described it not as an action programme but as a discussion paper, and that is after 11 years of Conservative government.

The immediate response to the White Paper was not very promising. Just about everybody in the press, whatever their political complexion, felt that the Government could have done far better.

Several hon. Members have referred to an environmental protection agency to deal with all environmental protection matters, and some hon. Members have queried the birth of the idea. The idea was probably born in one of the fine pressure groups such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, the Marine Conservation Society or the Council for the Protection of Rural England. A host of bodies are doing fine work and are acting as an irritant, as the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) described it, provoking us to improve our environment.

The Labour party's proposal for an environmental protection service under one roof was first made in a statement to the Labour party conference in 1986. It was included as a manifesto commitment in 1987. I have been looking at the White Paper, because the Minister said that it intimated that the Government would consider an environmental protection agency. All that I have been able to find in the White Paper are some references to it on page 232. When describing the medium-term options, the Government said:

"The disbenefits of administrative change will diminish over time, and experience with the new systems may add to the case for some further rationalisation of these structures. One option which the Government will wish to consider in due course would be to create a new umbrella body responsible for overseeing the pollution control work of the NRA and HMIP. Under such an arrangement these bodies would keep their separate identity and independence, but the new umbrella body would oversee their implementation of pollution control and work for greater consistency of approach."

That is the medium-term option, which still does not envisage a single body. Nevertheless, I would be quite happy for the Minister to direct me to the spot in the White Paper at which there is eminent consideration of introducing a single environmental protection agency. Of course, that is only to be lauded. The Prime Minister made a statement earlier this week, and I hope that, as a result, we will develop a coherent position on an environmental protection agency.

The National Society for Clean Air believes that there are many undecided questions about how the agency will work. Reading between the lines of its brief, it suspects that that idea has not properly been worked out and that it has yet to be considered properly by all Departments. Perhaps the Minister could tell me how many times the ministerial committee for co-ordinating environment policy has met since the publication of the White Paper. I have been given to understand that it has met just once, which hardly seems a good record for a Government who are supposed to be concerned about our environment.

The truth is that the Government are reluctant participants in the effort to clean up our environment. They have been forced to act. Let us not forget that they have been in power since 1979. The White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", was produced only after the Government had been shocked out of their wits by the performance of the Green party in the European elections in areas that are normally thought of as Conservative strongholds. That is why the Government were pushed and prompted into action. However, our policies were already well developed. In 1979, after the European elections, the British Labour group, of which I used to be a member, provided the first chairman of the European Parliament's environment policy committee in Mr. Ken Collins, who is a very good friend of mine. He was the first chairman; he was then vice-chairman for a brief period and is now once again the chairman of that committee. That shows the priority that the Labour Members of the European Parliament attached to participating in environmental policy making.

In virtually every policy area, the Government have been dragged along by European legislation. Let us take water quality as an example. The directive on beaches, about which we have heard a lot this morning, was supposed to have been implemented in full by 1986, but the Government will be lucky if they can implement it by 1996. Although the target date in most cases is 1995, there already seems to be some slippage in the programme. It does not look as if those dates will be achieved. Although, as I have said, the directive was supposed to be fully implemented by 1986, it was not until that year, after seven years of Conservative government, that the number of British beaches falling under the terms of the directive was increased from 27 to the top 300. As was revealed by my own questions in the European Parliament, the Government decided to act only after they had been threatened with action in the European Court of Justice.

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

Although the privatisation of the water industry resulted in the plus of a separate National Rivers Authority to supervise and to try to control the activities of the errant water companies, sewage works were given derogations that allowed them to pollute the water. Despite having those derogations, there have still been instances of privatised water companies polluting water and being threatened with prosecution or prosecuted by the NRA.

On top of that, the chairmen of the water companies have been giving themselves huge pay rises. The chairman of Welsh Water has had an 88 per cent. rise while that company's workers have received about 8 per cent. The water company increased its charges by 16·5 per cent. In the same year its chairman received a massive pay rise, supposedly to reflect the improved performance of the company. It is true that the company made a huge profit, but the chairman was in charge of a company in which the number of pollution incidents for which it was responsible doubled.

The Government should do something serious about such massive pay increases, which the Minister condemned at environment questions last Wednesday. He should consider introducing a fine scheme. A modest £10 reduction for each pollution incident could be knocked off the salary of the chairmen of water companies. In the case of the Welsh chairman, who is one of my constituents, that would result in a cut of more than £7,000.

The chairman of Welsh Water had the cheek and the humbug to be quoted in a long interview which appeared in yesterday's issue of the *Western Mail*. He said:

"What bothers me more and upsets me greatly is when my boys, the workers who provide the water and clean up our mess, get the flak as well. People just do not realise the value of what we at Welsh Water provide—and all for about 25p a day."

Those workers were not valued sufficiently for the chairman of Welsh water to give them a similar increase to that which his board gave him. That was at a time when pollution incidents doubled.

The Government have hamstrung the National Rivers Authority in taking water companies to court when they pollute. An unpleasant incident has been the result of some correspondence between the Minister and me. It involved the pollution of Eaglie brook with PCBs. In a reply dated 27 June the Minister said that the Germans had been allowed two years to meet the pollution emission standards. Yet a letter was sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) from the free university of Berlin. It arrived with us the day before the letter from the Minister. It says:

"Concerning your question whether in Germany the textile industry was given a two-year permit to fulful the PCP directive of the European Community, I have asked the German environmental agency Mr. Neihardt, who is responsible for PCP. He told me that the PCP regulation and the regulation for dangerous materials in 1989-90 came into force and that PCP for textiles was forbidden immediately in Germany."

That means that the textile industry had no transitional period. There seems to be a conflict between what the Minister understands about the position in Germany and what the Germans understand.

Across the board the Government have been dragging their feet. For example, for the sake of energy efficiency, how do we cut CO_2 emissions? Simply by following the recommendations in the House of Lords report which was leaked this week—undoubtedly we shall have the benefit of it shortly—we could make a 10 per cent. reduction in our energy use. We could do that if only, instead of cutting the money available for the Energy Efficiency Office, the Government increased it and made a serious effort to deal with energy efficiency problems. That is one simple way in which the Government could take some immediate action.

The Planning and Compensation Bill does not contain a single measure sponsored by the Government which has anything to do with improving our environment.

Mr. Trippier: Does the hon. Gentleman intend to allow me to reply to the debate?

Mr. Griffiths: The Minister will realise that the informal agreement made behind the Chair has not been honoured. I can see no reason why I should not complete the points that I want to make and leave the Minister whatever time is left at the end. Even if I do that, I believe that every Conservative Member has spoken longer than me. I shall complete my remarks and in the time left the Minister can reply to the debate.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Griffiths: If I give way, that would take time out of the Minister's speech.

The Government have dragged their feet on air pollution, because they have not honoured their commitment to clean up power stations.

Mr. Trippier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Griffiths: No, I will not.

The Government have not honoured their commitments on flue gas desulphurisation which were made when the directive on emission standards was discussed in Europe.

Mr. Mans: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) claims that his speech will be shorter than that of any Conservative Member. I ask him to withdraw that inaccurate claim.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): That is an interesting point, but it is not one that the Chair can resolve.

Mr. Holt: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Many of us came here to participate in the debate. We had hoped that, at the end, a Minister of the Crown would answer the points and criticisms that we have made. Is not it wrong, unusual and unparliamentary that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman should deliberately seek to speak out time to preclude the Minister from replying to the points raised by my hon. Friends and me?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is usual for both Front-Bench spokesmen to have an opportunity to wind up such a debate. That is what I would expect to happen.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is there a possibility through our Standing Orders to prolong the debate by resolution of the House? It is clear from what the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) has said that he has no intention of allowing the Minister to reply to the debate. As Chairman of a Select Committee representing all parties, I

raised a number of important questions on the Prime Minister's statement at the beginning of the week on which I and many people outside the House are anxious to hear an answer. The hon. Member for Bridgend is now denying us that opportunity.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing and experienced parliamentarian. He knows that the Chair has no authority in such matters. We have three minutes only left; we must now make progress.

Mr. Holt: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have been here when the Chair has ordered someone to sit down. When Bruinvels was here he was ordered to sit down and shut up because the Chair had had enough. Could not you use that authority today?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I use much gentler tactics and hold my fury for another occasion.

Mr. Roger King: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. What advice would you give to me? I asked my hon. Friend the Minister a number of questions and I am now awaiting a response. Have you any suggestions as to how I might receive that response, Madam Deputy Speaker? Will I receive it via the written word or——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman understands our practices and Standing Orders, so he will know that the Chair does not offer advice across the Chamber. It is normal for such advice to be sought outside the Chamber. The hon. Member is seeking information from the Minister, and all I can suggest is that he now gets it in writing, unless we can make some progress so that the Minister has a couple of minutes in which to reply.

Mr. Griffiths: When I was interrupted, I had spoken for less than 20 minutes—far less than many Conservative Members. Nearly five minutes have been taken up by the points of order, and I am sorry if the Minister will not have time to respond. Frankly, the time left for the wind-up speeches was 23 minutes, all because Conservative Members spoke for so long.

Sir Hugh Rossi: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In relation to the hon. Gentleman's last statement, do you agree that it has been the time-honoured practice in the House that, whatever time may have been taken in speeches by Back Benchers, the remaining time at the end of a debate is divided equally between the Minister and the shadow Minister? That practice has been breached disgracefully this afternoon by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have always understood when I have been in the Chair that the time remaining is divided equally between Members on both Front Benches.

Mr. Trippier: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In view of the disgraceful behaviour of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), I assure hon. Members who have participated in the debate that I shall reply to them by letter on the points that they raised. I shall at least observe that courtesy, even if the hon. Member for Bridgend does not seem to recognise any courtesy.

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (FINANCE BILL)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Finance Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

FOREIGN CORPORATIONS BILL *[LORDS]*

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Foreign Corporations Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, the Deer Bill *[Lords]*, the Land Drainage Bill *[Lords]*, the Statute Law Revision (Isle of Man) Bill *[Lords]*, the Statutory Water Companies Bill *[Lords]*, the Water Consolidation (Consequential Provisions) Bill *[Lords]*, the Water Industry Bill *[Lords]* and the Water Resources Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bills have been read a second time.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Community Charge

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I welcome this opportunity to raise in the House a very important matter. The roots of this debate lie deep in the grubby soil of municipal extremism. For years Labour party activists have seen what they think is an opportunity to attack the Government through town halls. Never mind the provision of good, affordable local services; the cry went up that the town hall must oppose the House of Commons.

The latest manifestation of that was announcements by Labour elected representatives—councillors and, I am sorry to say, Members of this House—that they would refuse to pay the community charge. By what perversion of parliamentary political principle they decided to do that I do not know. If anyone should know that in this country the rule is that of law, it should be democratically elected representatives.

The main result of that was to give heart to those who decided to follow their example, doubtless on the ground that if the people at the town hall, the leaders of the community, said it was all right, it must be all right for them.

In my borough, the London borough of Waltham Forest, £60 million should have been collected last year, but £16·79 million is still outstanding, so that only 72 per cent. has been collected. That makes Waltham Forest the seventh worst performer in the country. The top six—Lambeth, Liverpool, Islington, Newham, Southampton and Birmingham—are all Labour, as is Waltham Forest.

The average collection rate across the country is 90 per cent. Waltham Forest and those others come nowhere near that. By the fact that they have collected so little, they have inevitably dragged the average collection rate down, though in some authorities it is nearly 100 per cent.

One can tell at a glance which authorities are Labour and which have a poor record in collecting community charge—the two go together—as they have all imposed heavy surcharges on their community charge payers this year to make up for their incompetence last year.

The surcharge in Waltham Forest is no less than £50·29. That has caused enormous resentment and public outcry. What a record that Labour council has since it was elected in 1986. In 1987 it increased rates by 62 per cent. It has one of the highest community charges in the country, £438 last year, and is now imposing a heavy surcharge of more than £50 to pay for women's committees and nuclear-free zones. But it has rubbish-strewn streets and the worst education results in London, despite spending the most money. In other words, it has all the manifestations of extreme loony left socialism.

May I dwell a little further on that point. The whole debacle was made even worse by the fact that the chief revenue officer responsible for collecting the community charge was suspended last September. Just before Christmas he was reinstated but was demoted to a lower grade, whereupon—not surprisingly—he left and his position is still vacant. Several other staff members were also suspended. Some were disciplined, some were sacked, and others left. Why did that happen, and why did those in authority let it happen, at such a crucial time? It happened because one of the staff made allegations of racism. Although I believe that allegations of racism should be looked into, we must also ask why they are made. That member of staff took offence at the picture of a chimpanzee on a wall. Apparently, the chimpanzee had been there for several years—rather longer than many members of staff.

Another important fact is rent arrears in council dwellings. That is germane because under the old rating system, rates were collected—or not collected—with the rent. Under the community charge, that becomes a separate item so that if tenants have become used to not paying their rent and therefore do not pay their rates, by logical extension they will want to get used to not paying their community charge. The London borough of Waltham Forest has a dreadful record in that respect. Arrears as a percentage of the rent roll stand at 18 per cent. and some £4 million are outstanding. That is the ninth worst record in the country. The council is always complaining about lack of resources, but if it collected those £4 million it could start to reduce its capital debt, which now stands at more than £150 million.

The headline in a local paper dated 10 July 1991 said:

"Row over Poll Tax Non-Payers—Labour councillor slams 'selfish' rebels and 'free-loading' residents."

The article says.

"A Labour councillor has made a stinging attack on fellow Socialist councillors who have been refusing to pay their poll tax. And Councillor Greg Hayman rebukes 'selfish' and 'free-loading' residents who think they can pull a fast one and escape paying the much criticised tax. Councillor Hayman has hit out because he has received many complaints from residents about the extra"

money that the council

"has put on to this year's poll tax to make up for the shortfall created by non-payers last year."

He said that the extra surcharge was "simply not fair." The article continued that Councillor Hayman said:

"Some people have been jumping on the non-payment bandwagon because a few councillors, who should have known better, set a bad example. 'Any freeloaders, who think they can get away with it, will find that the council is not soft on non-payers.' Five Labour councillors have so far been prosecuted for not paying their poll tax . . . Cllr Hayman said: 'Just what were these councillors trying to prove? They have certainly not helped those conscientious people who are struggling to pay their poll tax and certainly not the borough's pensioners who still have to pay one-fifth of the poll tax. 'The actions of these councillors and other non-payers was totally selfish because cuts are now being made which affect residents who need to use the services we provide. If we don't collect the money, we have to cut services as well as putting up the poll tax.' Cllr Hayman said councillors who have still not paid up should resign from the Labour group. He is considering ways of forcing non-paying councillors to stand down. At least two of the rebels have yet to pay the poll tax even after they were taken to court."

That article was in the *Islington Chronicle*. There seems to be a mild outburst of realism and common sense in one small section of the Labour party. Let us hope that it spreads from Islington to Waltham Forest, although so far it has shown no signs of doing so. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) was sent to prison yesterday for not paying his poll tax.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Disgraceful.

Mr. Summerson: As my hon. Friend says, that non-payment was disgraceful—and what an example to

set. Are we law makers in this place or law breakers? The hon. Member for Broadgreen certainly learnt the lesson that if one breaks the law, one must pay the penalty.

I am well aware of the difficulties of collecting the community charge, but I am also aware that many conscientious and public-spirited people—the majority—have paid their poll tax and resent enormously the imposition of a huge surcharge as a result of Waltham Forest council failing to collect a reasonable proportion of last year's community charge and of Labour councillors and Members of Parliament, by their example, encouraging non-payment.

What is to be done? I have three suggestions. First, those elected councillors who have publicly announced that they will defy the law should be held responsible, not only for their own non-payment, but the non-payment of others. They should be surcharged and disqualified from office. Secondly, a list of payers and non-payers should be published so that people can see who have paid their dues and who have not. Thirdly, there should be more stipendiary magistrates. Those who organised the "Can't pay won't pay" campaign knew very well what they were about when they urged as many non-payers as possible to turn up at court—the idea being to block the system. They should not be allowed to succeed.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider those suggestions carefully, as my constituents are crying out for redress. I hope that he will also take this opportunity to condemn those Labour councillors who publicly announced last year that they would refuse to pay the community charge, thus heaping an even greater burden on my constituents this year.

2.43 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) on using this Adjournment debate to raise an important issue which affects his constituents and mine. It also affects the constituents of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who is not here—perhaps because he could not speak on the matter without shame at his record.

This is a disgraceful matter, and I have received many letters from my constituents who are deeply upset and question the legality of a process by which they are called upon to pay the debts of others who wilfully refuse to pay. As my hon. Friend the Minister will explain, that is the law and there is no other option, but it is deeply regrettable that this should have occurred.

As my hon. Friend said, the administration of the local authority is a total shambles. He might also have mentioned, with good cause, the disgraceful state of affairs in the social services department. Many of our constituents and, I am sure, many constituents in Leyton are left without the services that they should have, not because of a shortage of money, but because of an administrative shambles and a gross waste of money.

It is a sad thought that if the council's collection rate is as bad in the current year as it was in the year just ended, there will be a further surcharge of about £12·50 in respect of the uncollected £50 surcharge from this year. That is a measure of the scandalous waste, the scandalous politicking and the scandalous shambles of this council. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take up all the suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow and that he will act on the matter. Something must be done.

2·45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) on his success in being able to raise this important issue on the Adjournment. Following his question to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities last Wednesday, it is yet another example of his commitment to ensure that his constituents' concerns are voiced in the House. Those constituents are very well served by him and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), whom I am delighted to see speaking in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow.

My right hon. Friend is right. The most destructive kind of politicking goes on in authorities such as Waltham Forest. It is not as if the authority is typical of many Labour authorities. Will the Labour party suggest that Labour authorities that manage to collect the community charge should be disregarded or expelled, as the lunatics, who now appear to be unpopular, have been? Of the best four authorities in terms of collection charge record, two are Labour—Cannock Chase and Copeland. Cannock Chase has managed to collect 110 per cent. of its charge and Copeland has managed to collect 105 per cent. of its charge. The Labour party needs to get its act together.

Before dealing with my hon. Friend's specific concerns, I should like to set out some background on the level of charges, billing arrangements and enforcement. The Government accepted earlier this year that the burden of taxation falling on local community charge payers was too high. The Chancellor took steps in his Budget to redress the balance. This year, therefore, only 15 per cent. of the cost of local services is met directly by community charge payers, with more of the burden shared nationally through the increase in value added tax. This was reflected in a £140 reduction in the headline community charge. We have held down the charges of the highest spenders through capping. In addition, we have significantly improved the relief available to those whose community charge bills taken at household level were higher than their old rates bill. This year, a couple should pay no more than £52 in combined community charge above the total of the 1989-90 rates bill for the household. Each additional adult is required to contribute only an extra £52. In this way, we have brought down the average community charge payable to £215. We believe that that is affordable. For those on income support and benefit, effective assistance remains in place.

At the same time, we believe that the arrangements for billing people are fair and reasonable. Everybody has a statutory right to pay the community charge in manageable instalments. Nobody becomes liable to pay the community charge until he or she receives a demand notice from the charging authority in whose area he or she is resident. When he or she gets the bill, the charge payer is given a specified date, no sooner than 14 days after the issue of the Bill, by which he or she should pay the first instalment. If the charge payer does not meet that instalment, he or she is given a number of further opportunities to pay.

[Mr. Robert Key]

A first reminder notice is issued, requiring the outstanding amount to be paid within seven days. After this, the authority may also issue a second reminder notice, but it is under no obligation to do so. Our regulations ensure that a charge payer is given at least two and possibly three opportunities to pay his or her community charge instalment. There is a further step before the local authority has to consider enforcement action. If he or she fails to pay the first instalment following the issue of reminders, the charge payer becomes liable to pay the authority the full amount of the community charge for the whole year. He or she has a further seven days in which to pay.

We believe that the charges set this year are affordable and that charge payers are given every opportunity to pay them in a manageable way. There can therefore be no excuse whatever for non-payment, and let me make it very clear that there will be no amnesty for non-payers.

Sadly, there has been significant non-payment. To deal with that we provided local authorities with wide powers to take enforcement action to recover sums due. This procedure starts when the council applies to a magistrates court for a summons to require a person involved to attend a court to explain to the magistrate why he or she had not paid the charge. If the Bill and the reminder have been issued in accordance with the regulations and the person cannot show good cause why the required sum has not been paid, the magistrate will issue a liability order to the council so that it can take action. This order covers both the community charge payable and the costs incurred by the charging authority and the court in obtaining and issuing the order.

We have seen to it that local authorities have stronger and wider powers to recover sums due than they did in relation to the old domestic rates. Local authorities may use distress, with bailiffs removing and selling goods to the value for the debt and their own fees. In addition, we have given authorities the power to attach a defaulter's earnings or to require the Department of Social Security to make deductions from his or her income support payments. These are powerful instruments and, of course, ultimately there remains the possibility of imprisonment for persistent and wilful non-payers.

Most authorities use bailiffs as their first port of call in enforcing the community charge. It is important that the activities of bailiffs are subject to fair but stringent controls. I know that local authorities have individual codes of practice. It is, of course, the isolated instances when something goes wrong that attract the media attention.

My Department has been told by the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation that it aims to establish a national code of practice to cover bailiffs work on collecting the community charge. It aims to have this code agreed between the local authority associations, the Certificated Bailiffs Association and consumer groups, such as the National Consumer Council. There is a great merit in that suggestion and I urge all parties involved to do their utmost to ensure that a code of practice agreeable to to all parties emerges from these discussions as soon as possible.

If authorities use their powers to the full extent, they will be able to recover the charge from people who have not made payment. I acknowledge that last year when enforcement proceedings started some authorities had difficulty getting sufficient magistrates court time to hear the necessary amount of summonses. That situation is much improved and most authorities have reached agreement with their local court. We are greatly indebted to our magistrates for taking on this task in addition to their already heavy agenda of duties. I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow said about the need for more magistrates, especially stipendiary magistrates. I shall draw that to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Against that background, how is collection going nationally? We have yet to see the local authorities' returns for the first quarter of this financial year. Returns received from local authorities at the end of the last financial year showed that in England authorities had on average received 90 per cent. of the community charge they expected to collect. That is, of course, an average—some did better and some worse. As an average, it is somewhat lower than what was achieved under the old domestic rates. But it is not a lot lower and it is far from being the horror story that we usually read about in the press.

Looking at individual authorities' records, it is no surprise to find that responsible boroughs such as Westminster have a considerably better collection record than for instance Lambeth, and Islington which my hon. Friend mentioned.

It may help if I say a little about how Waltham Forest fared in this year's revenue support grant settlement. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow will know, it did well. Its standard spending assessment rose by nearly 21 per cent. to £194·1 million and its external support—grant—and non-domestic rate income rose, before taking account of community charge reduction grant, to £160·2 million, an increase of nearly 20 per cent. which is the equivalent of £998 for each adult in the borough of Walthamstow. That is a remarkable amount for each taxpayer to share with the people of that borough.

The community charge originally set by Waltham Forest in 1991-92 was £437, almost the same as in the previous year. The headline charge was reduced to £297 by the Government's general reduction of £140. So in my hon. Friend's borough, as in the rest of the country, people are paying substantially less in community charge thanks to the Government's decision to shift the burden of local spending away from charge payers.

I shall now move on to the specific points raised by my hon. Friend. He was most concerned about the size of losses on collection in his own authority and others which were being passed on to law-abiding community charge payers to meet. I have every sympathy with him. Such losses should not arise. First, it is unlawful and irresponsible for individuals to withhold individual community charge payments, and to attempt to transfer the burden of payment on to those who are rightly making their contribution. That is simply unreasonable. Secondly, as I outlined earlier, we have given authorities very substantial powers to enforce payment of the community charge. If authorities use those powers effectively, they can keep uncollectable losses to an absolute minimum.

I agree that substantial allowances for uncollected charges are unacceptable. Nevertheless, where there are such uncollectable charges, the local authority has a duty to make allowances for the amount of debt that it will not

be able to recover and then set a community charge that takes this into account. I understand and sympathise with those who feel that it is unreasonable to pay for the losses created by the non-payment of others, but they should not break the law themselves. All charge payers are under a legal duty to pay the community charge set by their authority. The element in the bill for uncollected community charge forms part of that charge and charge payers must pay it, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford said.

I fear that it is a general rule of life that the law-abiding pay extra to make up for the behaviour of the feckless, the irresponsible or the criminal. Ask the manager of any High street store how much lower prices would be if it were not for theft and pilfering.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow then mentioned the case of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields). I find it beyond comprehension that someone who was elected to represent his constituents in the House should behave in such an irresponsible manner. As the leader of his party pointed out, Members of Parliament are elected to make the laws, not to break them. The chairman of Bootle magistrates clearly took a serious view of this when he imprisoned the hon. Member for Broadgreen for 60 days. The hon. Gentleman has set an appalling example, and I hope that this does not lead to other people following his irresponsible action.

I understand that the Freedom Association has sent the Labour party a cheque with which to pay the bill of the hon. Member for Broadgreen but that the Labour party has rejected it. Labour wants to wash its hands of this. I have some advice for the Labour party, which I am glad to see is represented by one of its hon. Members. It will continue to lose credibility in the House and outside until it disowns all hon. Members who do not pay their community charge.

We have recently looked at the provisions for the surcharge and disqualification of councillors in the context of the Widdicombe committee's recommendations and concluded that the provisions were already sufficiently stringent.

Payment of the community charge will remain an important issue this year and next, but perhaps I can end by looking to the future. We have, of course, announced that the community charge will be replaced by the council tax. We have recently completed wide consultations on the new tax and we are currently considering responses to that consultation very carefully. We shall make clear the next steps in due course. Ease of administration and collection have been two of the key factors in designing the council tax. We believe that the proposals that we have put forward will meet all our objectives in this area while maintaining fairness and accountability.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow on raising this important issue on the Floor of the House. I repeat what I said at the beginning—his constituents are fortunate to be represented by so diligent a Member.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 1 July 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Official Files

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Attorney-General what guidelines cover the circumstances in which official files held by Departments may be destroyed; and what changes have taken place in these guidelines in the last 20 years.

The Attorney-General: The framework within which records of Government Departments are selected for permanent preservation is that recommended in the report of the Grigg committee in 1954 (Cmd. 9163) and accepted by the Government in 1955. The Public Record Office issues guidelines to Departments on the procedures to be followed and on the general criteria for selection. These guidelines are kept under review by the Public Record Office and were last updated in 1983.

Section 3(6) of the Public Records Act 1958 provides that records that have been rejected as not required for permanent preservation shall be destroyed unless the approval of the Lord Chancellor has been obtained for their disposal in some other way.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total Government expenditure on funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for 1990-91, itemised by borough and district and identifying for each borough and district the amount of education expenditure for that financial year.

Mrs. Rumbold: The following local authorities received grant, at the rate of 75 per cent. of salary costs, under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 in the financial year 1990-91.

Precise figures for the amount of grant paid for education expenditure to each authority are not available. It is estimated, however, that education provision accounts for approximately 80 per cent. of total grant.

ENGLAND

	£
County Councils	
Avon	899,403
Bedfordshire	2,462,492
Berkshire	1,648,953
Buckinghamshire	1,365,268
Cambridgeshire	1,161,520
Cheshire	23,539
Cleveland	643,796
Derbyshire	1,186,688
Devon	11,640
Essex	12,692
Gloucestershire	386,154
Hampshire	442,087
Hereford & Worcester	13,912
Hertfordshire	1,926,714
Humberside	208,176
Kent	298,059
Lancashire	5,476,253
Leicestershire	3,515,092
Northamptonshire	1,153,879
North Yorkshire	13,007
Nottinghamshire	1,989,788
Oxfordshire	904,018
Shropshire	73,303
Staffordshire	783,444
Suffolk	153,571
Surrey	96,172
Warwickshire	1,079,088
West Sussex	148,272
Wiltshire	212,224
West Midlands FCDA	73,486
West Yorkshire FCDA	111,294
METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS	
Greater Manchester	
Bolton	1,044,759
Bury metropolitan borough council	262,017
Manchester city council	2,341,572
Oldham metropolitan borough council	2,469,256
Rochdale metropolitan borough council	1,140,765
Stockport metropolitan borough council	29,037
Tameside metropolitan borough council	724,154
Trafford metropolitan borough council	298,489
Merseyside	
Liverpool city council	188,171
South Yorkshire	
Doncaster metropolitan borough council	17,856
Rotherham metropolitan borough council	291,825
Sheffield metropolitan district council	2,138,900
Tyne and Wear	
Newcastle city council	448,275
North Tyneside metropolitan borough council	35,909
Sunderland borough council	49,508
West Midlands	
Birmingham city council	5,546,014
Coventry city council	3,264,069
Dudley metropolitan borough council	1,027,900
Sandwell metropolitan borough council	1,795,748
Walsall metropolitan borough council	1,723,646
Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council	1,675,084
West Yorkshire	
Bradford City metropolitan council	6,516,031
Calderdale metropolitan borough council	878,222
Kirklees metropolitan council	2,456,441
Leeds City council	1,992,965
Wakefield metropolitan district council	159,907
Non Metropolitan Districts	
Blackburn	111,603
Bristol City council	52,787
Derby City council	43,301
Gloucester City council	10,798
Gravesham borough council	31,775
Hyndburn borough council	9,542
Ipswich borough council	7,545
Leicester City council	179,196
Luton borough council	42,744
Middlesbrough borough council	19,990
Milton Keynes borough council	14,514
Nottingham City council	144,387
Oxford City council	26,603
Pendle borough council	17,066
Peterborough City council	66,127
Preston borough council	4,456
Reading borough council	19,312

	£
Redditch borough council	12,928
Slough Corporation	20,434
Scunthorpe county council	12,858
Southampton City council	65,434
St. Albans district council	18,744
Wycombe district council	38,956
London Boroughs	
London Boroughs Grants Unit	7,022
Inner London	
Camden	1,544,899
City of London	23,500
Greenwich	1,248,340
Hackney	4,299,227
Hammersmith	1,011,358
ILEA	19,308,052
Islington	1,727,799
Kensington and Chelsea	1,051,382
Lambeth	1,468,067
Lewisham	1,440,252
Southwark	2,302,159
Tower Hamlets	4,353,398
Wandsworth	2,117,834
Westminster	1,519,653
Outer London	
Barking	245,849
Barnet	1,202,176
Bexley	15,523
Brent	2,614,389
Croydon	1,384,268
Ealing	5,579,558
Enfield	535,477
Haringey	2,871,610
Harrow	755,346
Havering	29,798
Hillingdon	448,158
Hounslow	1,620,992
Merton	588,786
Newham	2,580,767
Redbridge	880,844
Richmond	74,879
Sutton	15,696
Waltham Forest	1,627,145
Wales	
South Glamorgan City Council	483,494
Cardiff City Council	22,692
Colleges and Polytechnics	
London Institute	42,152
City of London Polytechnic	66,238
Huddersfield Polytechnic	18,027
Lancashire Polytechnic	117,345
Luton College of Further Education	70,708
Leeds Polytechnic	19,494
Teesside Polytechnic	92,119
Grant Maintained Schools	94,905
Total Expenditure	135,482,981

Note:

(i) Some payments (eg ILEA) include late submitted claims and do not therefore relate solely to a local authorities expenditure for the single year in question.

(ii) The table also shows the grant paid to 5 polytechnics, one College for Further Education and 4 Grant Maintained Schools who, by virtue of Section 211 of the Education Reform Act 1988, may claim section 11 grant direct.

Civil Damages

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the total amount paid out by police authorities for civil damages since 1982.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Compensation paid out by police authorities for civil damages under section 48 (2) b of the Police Act 1964 is a matter for the police authority concerned and there is therefore no central record of the total amount paid out by police authorities.

Wrongful Imprisonment

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to improve the machinery that exists for paying compensation to people who have been wrongly imprisoned and are subsequently released; and whether he has any plans to provide compensation to people whose close relatives are wrongly imprisoned.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans at present to amend the existing arrangements under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, or under the ex-gratia scheme, for the payment of compensation to those who have been imprisoned as a result of a wrongful conviction.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: By the end of the current financial year, my Department expects to have spent £1 million on television advertising for fire safety and £2·2 million on television advertising for crime prevention.

Non-television publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 are:

	£
Electoral Registration	520,000
Absent Voting	650,000
Civil Protection Magazine (Publication)	100,000
Police Recruitment: Graduate/Ethnic	338,000
Police: Special Constable Recruitment	1,488,000
Crime Prevention	3,900,000
Fire Prevention and Safety	2,064,000
Passports	132,000
Prison Service Recruitment	1,036,000

THE ARTS

Arts Funding (London)

33. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has made arrangements to meet representatives of the Association of London Authorities and London Boroughs Association to discuss arts funding in London.

Mr. Renton: I have made arrangements to meet the Association of London Authorities on 25 July. The London Boroughs Association has asked to explore the issues with my officials, and a meeting has been arranged for 8 July.

Museums (Admission Charges)

34. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his most recent assessment of the effects of admission charges to museums introduced in the past four years.

Mr. Renton: Those museums where admission charges have been introduced have reported that, after dropping initially, attendances have generally picked up, and in many cases, have returned to previous levels. Figures recorded before the introduction of admission charges cannot however be regarded as wholly reliable.

Arts Provision (Wales)

35. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet local authority leaders to discuss arts provision in Wales.

Mr. Renton: I have no plans to do so. However, I met the chairman and senior officers of the Welsh Arts Council in Cardiff recently, and they hold annual meetings with representatives of the local authorities in Wales.

Arts Spending (London)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Arts what is the average spending on the arts across London boroughs during the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Local authority arts funding is discretionary and there is no central reporting requirement. I am afraid that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service Morale

41. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what steps he is proposing to take to improve morale in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Our aim is to have an efficient, effective and well-motivated civil service.

Community Institutions

Mr. Moate: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what steps he is taking to increase the number of United Kingdom secondees to Community institutions.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington).

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet Mr. Kenneth McGinley, chairman of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) on 18 April 1991 at column 568.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1991-92 the number of basic rate and higher rate taxpayers with earned incomes above the national insurance contribution upper earnings limit, giving figures separately for *(a)* husbands, *(b)* wives, *(c)* single men and *(d)* single women and distinguishing between pensioners and non-pensioners.

Mr. Maude: The latest estimates in respect of 1991-92 are given in the table on two bases depending on the scope of earned income. The first basis compares the annual equivalent of the NIC upper earnings limit—UEL—with the total of earnings from employment and self-employment for those subject to NIC. The second basis compares the UEL with total earned income, including pensions and taxable benefits in kind, for all individuals.

Millions

	Taxpaying individuals with earnings subject to NIC above the UEL			*Taxpaying individuals with total earned income above the UEL*		
	Basic rate only	*Higher rate*	*Total*	*Basic rate only*	*Higher rate*	*Total*
Taxpayers aged under 65:						
Husbands	1·4	1·1	2·5	1·5	1·1	2·6
Wives	0·1	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·1	0·2
Single men	0·3	0·2	0·5	0·3	0·2	0·5
Single women	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·2	0·1	0·3
Taxpayers aged 65 and over	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·1	0·1
Total	2·0	1·4	3·4	2·1	1·6	3·7

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1991-92 the number of top rate taxpayers with *(a)* gross and *(b)* taxable incomes within the following income ranges (i) £23,700 to £27,700, (ii) £27,000 to £30,000, (iii) £30,000 to £35,000, (iv) £35,000 to £40,000, (v) £40,000 to £45,000, (vi) £45,000 to £50,000, (vii) £50,000 to £55,000, (viii) £55,000 to £60,000 and (ix) over £60,000.

Mr. Maude: Since mortgage interest is not to be deductible at the higher rate for 1991-92 it is appropriate to analyse higher rate taxpayers by range of income after deducting allowances and reliefs excluding mortgage interest.

The latest estimates are as follows:

Total income for income tax purposes £ per year	Number of higher rate taxpayers in 1991-92 Thousands
23,700–27,700	10
27,700–30,000	110
30,000–35,000	480
35,000–40,000	320
40,000–45,000	210
45,000–50,000	130
50,000–55,000	90
55,000–60,000	60
Over 60,000	290
TOTAL	1,700

Total income less allowances and reliefs[1] £ per year	Number of higher rate taxpayers in 1991-92 Thousands
23,700–27,700	470
27,700–30,000	190
30,000–35,000	320
35,000–40,000	190
40,000–45,000	120
45,000–50,000	80
50,000–55,000	60
55,000–60,000	50
Over 60,000	220
TOTAL	1,700

[1] Excluding mortgage interest.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of taxpayers in 1991-92 who have taxable incomes of less than £2,000, giving figures separately for single people, husbands and wives.

Mr. Maude: The latest estimates of taxpayers with taxable incomes in 1991-92 of less than £2,000 are as follows:

	Million
Single people	1·9
Husbands	1·2
Wives	1·6
TOTAL	4·7

Taxable income is income subject to tax from all sources after deducting allowances and reliefs.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), of 2 May, *Official Report*, column *301*, if he will publish the figures on the same basis showing separately average allowances and reliefs claimed against tax due under *(a)* schedule E and *(b)* schedule D.

Mr. Maude: Taxpayers can be analysed according to whether they have a main source of income taxed under schedule E. Latest estimates for 1990-91 are as follows:

Taxpayers with a main source of income from employment or from an occupational pension

Gross income £ per year	Amount of tax reliefs and allowances set against income £
0 to 5,000	3,200
5,000 to 10,000	4,200
10,000 to 15,000	5,300
15,000 to 20,000	6,300
20,000 to 25,000	7,100
25,000 to 30,000	7,500
30,000 to 40,000	7,700
40,000 to 50,000	8,500
over 50,000	10,300
Average	5,200

Other taxpayers

Gross income £ per year	Amount of tax reliefs and allowances set against income £
0 to 5,000	3,200
5,000 to 10,000	4,500
10,000 to 15,000	5,500
15,000 to 20,000	6,100
20,000 to 25,000	6,600
25,000 to 30,000	6,600
30,000 to 40,000	7,100
40,000 to 50,000	8,300
over 50,000	12,100
Average	5,300

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the same basis as his answer of 3 May, *Official Report*, column *354*, concerning the effect of an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs, if he will estimate the net effect of these options, assuming that all reliefs and allowances are limited to the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that, at 1991-92 levels of income, restricting all allowances and reliefs to the basic rate of income tax would yield about £2·2 billion. The additional yield from introducing upper limits of £10,000, £15,000 and £20,000 would be about £450 million, £150 million and £100 million, respectively, in a full year. The estimates do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the changes.

Lost Revenue

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated lost revenue to the Exchequer from employers not paying tax and national insurance contributions for *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* 1990.

Mr. Maude: The amounts of PAYE tax and class 1 national insurance contributions remitted or written off as irrecoverable in the accounts years to the end of October were as follows—

	PAYE (£ million)	NIC Class 1 (£ million)
1988	130·7	15·9
1989	122·9	15·1
1990[1]	107·1	17·3

[1] Provisional.

Public Information

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications the Public Records Office has received in each year since 1977 for the file T160/763/F14755; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Public Records Office does not hold records of aplications for files which are not in its keeping.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 June, *Official Report*, column *313*, what information he has on the means by which file T160/763/F14755 was destroyed.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Treasury records show only that the file was reviewed in 1977 and destroyed.

National Insurance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* employees and *(b)* self-employed people have earned income above the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions, distinguishing between basic rate and higher rate taxpayers.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* Latest estimates for 1991-92 are as follows:

Individual taxpayers aged under 65 with annual earnings[1] above the UEL

(millions)

Main source of earnings :	Basic rate taxpayer	Higher rate taxpayer	Total
Employment	1·9	1·1	3·0
Self-employment	0·1	0·3	0·4
Total	2·0	1·4	3·4

[1] Earnings subject to NIC from employment and self-employment.

The main source of earnings is as indicated in Inland Revenue administrative records for tax collection purposes. Taxpayers with substantial income from both sources are included in the "employment" category.

TRANSPORT

Regional Airports

13. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage the development of regional airports.

Mr. McLoughlin: Our liberalisation policies, both in the European Community and in bilateral negotiations, are increasing the scope for regional air services and we are facilitating development at local authority airports by issuing credit approvals, particularly for the first phase of Manchester's second terminal.

Railway Electrification

14. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on investment approval for railway electrification.

Mr. Freeman: We welcome worthwhile proposals for investment, including electrification, from British Rail. Proposals naturally have to be good value for money and affordable.

Freight Transport

15. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the establishment of freight terminals for onward transport of freight to the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The establishment of freight terminals for channel tunnel traffic is a commercial matter for British Rail, and does not require the Government's approval. British Rail keeps the Government fully informed of progress in preparing for the commencement of channel tunnel freight services.

Bus Deregulation

16. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his present proposals are for the deregulation of buses in London.

Mr. Freeman: The Government's proposals for the deregulation of buses in London were set out in the consultation paper "A Bus Strategy for London" issued in March. We have received more than 200 responses to that paper which are currently being assessed. An announcement on the Government's conclusions following the consultation exercise will be made shortly.

British Rail

17. **Mr. Samberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legislative changes he proposes following his recent speech on the future of British Rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We shall be working with British Rail and the private sector to identify further practical measures to encourage rail freight that could be brought forward without legislation. Our plans to give new operators a right of access to British Rail track will need legislation in due course.

London Channel Tunnel Group

18. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received a request to meet representatives of the London channel tunnel group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Yes. We are well aware of the support from this group of London boroughs for an easterly approach to Stratford for the rail link. My right hon. and learned Friend has told the group that he is not undertaking consultations himself, but that it will be for British Rail to consult once a preferred route is announced.

Chelmsford-Liverpool Street Line

19. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss British Rail's investment plans on the Chelmsford to Liverpool Street line.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend has regular meetings with the chairman of British Rail at which they discuss a wide range of issues.

Air Traffic Control

20. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to make any representations to his French counterpart on the operation of air traffic control on flights between London and Paris; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Industrial action by air traffic controllers in Paris has caused substantial delays to flights recently. The United Kingdom national air traffic services are in daily contact with their French counterparts to help relieve the situation. It is for the French authorities to resolve their own industrial relations problems.

Road and Rail Expenditure

21. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much spending on road and rail increased *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* between 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Rifkind: Since 1979 investment on road and rail in Great Britain has increased by about two thirds in real terms. Between 1974 and 1979, it fell by about a third in real terms.

M4 (Deaths)

22. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal injuries have been recorded on the M4 in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Chope: The number of people killed each year on the M4 motorway during the seven years 1983 to 1989, the period for which figures are readily available, was respectively: 29, 19, 24, 39, 33, 28 and 24.

Rail Privatisation

23. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which country he proposes to take as a model for his proposals in railway privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We believe that the privatisation of British Rail will be the model for other countries.

Transport Delays

24. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the cost of transport delays due to congestion, roadworks or breakdowns during 1990.

Mr. Rifkind: We are taking a wide range of measures to deal with congestion, including substantial investment in public transport, roads and traffic management. There are no reliable estimates of the total costs of congestion, but they are clearly large.

England-Scotland Road Links

25. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve road links between north-east England and Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department has a number of schemes in the current road programme which will improve links between north-east England and Scotland.

On the A1 north of Morpeth there are dual carriageway proposals at Brownieside and Marshall Meadows to the Scottish border.

Improvements to the A66 and A69 which link with the west coast routes to Scotland are also planned. These are at Temple Sowerby, Stainburn to Great Clifton and Stainmore to Banksgate on the A66 and the Haltwhistle on the A69.

Work on a dualling scheme between Bowes and the Durham/Cumbria boundary on the A66 is due to be completed by autumn 1992 and the A69 Brampton bypass was opened on 18 April 1991.

The preferred route for the extension of M6 Carlisle to near the border with Scotland was announced on 13 June 1991. Together with proposals by the Scottish Office, it will complete a motorway link to Glasgow.

All of these schemes have made, or will make a significant contribution to improving road links between the north-east and Scotland.

European Air Services

26. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the liberalisation of European air services in the last six months.

Mr. McLoughlin: The EC Transport Council in March agreed a proposal introducing a mechanism to enable swift action to be taken in cases of predatory practices by airlines. This is a vital ingredient of the single market. Two other EC regulations have also now taken effect: one which further liberalises arrangements for Community air cargo services, and one which sets minimum levels of denied boarding compensation for passengers. We now await the Commission's proposals for the final stage of liberalisation, which we understand will be put forward shortly.

Casualty Rates

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the rates and trends of European countries' road deaths and serious injuries since the beginning of 1987.

Mr. Chope: The definition of serious injury varies considerably between different countries. It is therefore not possible to make meaningful comparisons. The table gives information on road deaths in European Community countries taken from the United Nations Economic Council for Europe—ECE—publication "Statistics of road traffic accidents in Europe" for 1987, 1988 and 1989. The standard international definition of a fatality is where death occurs within 30 days of a road accident. Figures for those countries which use a different definition have been adjusted according to scaling factors used by the ECE.

Road deaths and rates of road deaths: EC countries 1987-89
Source: UN/ECE publication 'Statistics of road traffic accidents in Europe'.

	Number Killed[1]	Scaling Factor	Scaled Number Killed	Population (thousands)	Traffic (million veh kms)	Rate per 100,000 Population	Rate per 100 million vehicle kms
1987:							
United Kingdom	5,339	1·00	5,339	56,930	..	9·4	..
Great Britain	5,125	1·00	5,125	55,355	356,200[1]	9·3	1·4
Belgium	1,922	1·00	1,922	..	..	..	..
Denmark	698	1·00	698	5,125	..	13·6	..
France	9,855	1·09	10,742	55,510	..	19·4	..
Germany (West)	7,967	1·00	7,967	61,077	401,000	13·0	2·0
Greece	1,502	1·12	1,682	..	..	..	..
Ireland	462	1·00	462	3,543	..	13·0	..
Italy	6,784	1·07	7,259	..	313,655	..	2·3
Luxembourg	68	1·00	68	370	..	18·4	..
Netherlands	1,485	1·00	1,485	14,614	87,960	10·2	1·7
Portugal	2,296	1·30	2,985	..	..	..	..
Spain	5,858	1·30	7,615	38,832	92,485[2]	19·6	..
1988:							
United Kingdom	5,230	1·00	5,230	57,065	..	9·2	..
Great Britain	5,052	1·00	5,052	55,487	380,900[1]	9·1	1·3
Belgium	1,967	1·00	1,967	..	..	..	..
Denmark	713	1·00	713	5,129	..	13·9	..
France	10,548	1·09	11,497	55,750	..	20·6	..
Germany (West)	8,213	1·00	8,213	61,715	427,400	13·3	1·9
Greece	1,511	1·12	1,692	..	..	..	..
Ireland	463	1·00	463	3,538	..	13·1	..
Italy	6,939	1·07	7,425	57,505	331,800	12·9	2·2
Luxembourg	84	1·00	84	..	..	..	..
Netherlands	1,366	1·00	1,366	14,714	93,762	9·3	1·5
Portugal	2,534	1·30	3,294	10,305	..	32·0	..
Spain	6,348	1·30	8,252	39,078	99,159[2]	21·1	..
1989:							
United Kingdom	5,554	1·00	5,554	57,236	..	9·7	..
Great Britain	5,373	1·00	55,653	407,800[1]	9·7	1·3	
Belgium	1,993	1·00	1,993	..	..	..	
Denmark	670	1·00	670	5,130	..	13·1	..
France	10,528	1·09	11,476	..	..	..	..
Germany (West)	7,995	1·00	7,995	16,434	438,500	48·6	1·8
Greece	1,699	1·12	1,903	..	..	..	..
Ireland	460	1·00	460	..	..	..	..
Italy	6,410	1·07	6,859	57,575	..	11·9	..
Luxembourg	67	1·00	67	378	..	17·7	..
Netherlands	1,456	1·00	1,456	14,804	95,489	9·8	1·5
Portugal	2,375	1·30	3,088	10,337	..	29·9	..
Spain	7,188	1·30	9,344	38,925	105,000[2]	24·0	..

[1]Traffic data for Great Britain has been revised since the publication of the ECE bulletin. Data is taken from 'Road Accidents Great Britain 1989'.
[2]Traffic on state roads only.
.. Denotes data not available.

Children in Cars

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current rear seat occupancy rate by children in cars in traffic.

Mr. Chope: Observations from a Transport and Road Research Laboratory survey of seat belt wearing carried out in April indicate that 10 per cent. of cars contain rear seat passengers under the age of 14 years.

Transport 2000 Seminar

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will be represented at the seminar, "Transport; Roads for Development or Exploitation," organised by Transport 2000 at Westminster Central hall on 13 July.

Mr. Chope: No.

Seat Belts

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of his plans to monitor the effectiveness of compulsory rear seat belt wearing for adults which comes into effect on 1 July.

Mr. Chope: The roadside surveys of seat belt wearing carried out at six-monthly intervals by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory will monitor the change in wearing rates following introduction of the new law. In addition, the quarterly analysis by my Department of data from the road accident report forms completed by the police will reveal how effective the new law has been in reducing the number and severity of casualties among rear seat passengers.

Motor Cyclists

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further advice he will give to motor cyclists following the publication of "Your Driving Test and Driving".

Mr. Chope: I am pleased to announce that the Driving Standards Agency has produced an official reference book for motor cycle riders which will be published today. It covers a wide variety of subjects including all aspects of riding technique with particular emphasis on defensive riding, equipment, legal requirements, details of compulsory basic training, the motor cycle test and basic maintenance. The book will cost £6·95 and will be available from HMSO agents and high street bookstores. I am placing copies in the Library.

Buses (London)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many buses are currently being operated in the Greater London area; what the figures were 10 and 15 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: London Transport tells me that, excluding Green Line routes, there are currently 4,910 buses in the Greater London area operated by London Buses Ltd. or under agreement with, or under contract to, London Transport. The figures for 10 and 15 years ago were 5,094 and 5,611 respectively. The figure of 4,910 does not include buses operated under London local service licences.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the study, "The Hex Connection: Some Problems and Hazards Associated with the Transportation of Uranium Hexafluoride", by Dr. Miles Goldstick, published by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, in April.

Mr. McLoughlin: This publication is currently on order.

Transport Act 1985

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has conducted a recent survey on the effect of the Transport Act 1985 on off-peak and Sunday services.

Mr. McLoughlin: There has been no recent survey of off-peak and Sunday services.

London Transport (MMC Report)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on London Transport.

Mr. Freeman: None. I have however received one letter supporting an article which appeared in the *Financial Times* of 6 June about the MMC report, which called for more investment in the underground.

Road Signs

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those counties in England for which there are no motorway or trunk road signs to their principal towns.

Mr. Chope: The Isle of Wight is unique among English counties in this respect.

Fuel Efficiency

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by his Department to evaluate the effectiveness of corporate average fuel efficiency standards for motor vehicle manufacturers; and if he will introduce such standards in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 June 1991]:* The Department has examined the impact of the United States corporate average fuel efficiency scheme. Although the scheme has improved overall fuel economy within the vehicle fleet in the United States of America, it is generally acknowledged to be a regulatory measure made necessary by the very low gasoline prices in the United States of America.

The Government are working with the EC to ensure that if any measures are taken to regulate fuel economy, they are sensible and effective.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the European Commission about the environmental impact of the east London river crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has had no discussions with the European Commission about the east London river crossing. An official response to a letter from the Commission about the scheme was sent in December 1989.

Red Routes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the nearest proposed red route to Leyton and Leytonstone.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* The priority red route network will be based largely on the primary route network in London, as indicated in the discussion document "Traffic in London". Copies of this document were placed in the Library in December 1989.

It is likely therefore that the nearest routes to Leyton and Leytonstone will be the A106 and A11, but decisions will be taken only after consultation in accordance with the provisions of the Road Traffic Bill.

Pontypool-Newport Line

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investment proposals he has received from British Rail to improve services on the Pontypool to Newport line.

Mr. McLoughlin: British Rail has not proposed any investment for the Pontypool to Newport line.

Networker Express Trains

Mr. Monte: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress there has been towards approving investment in the new Networker express rolling stock for the Kent coast services of British Rail.

Mr. Rifkind: Investment priorities are a matter for British Rail. It has recently submitted a strategy document for this rolling stock to my Department. My officials are discussing it with the board. More work needs to be done by BR before a formal investment case can be presented.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Auditing Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the functions of the recognised supervisory bodies to be created under the Companies Act 1989 in respect of disciplining *(a)* auditing firms and *(b)* individual partners in auditing firms.

Mr. Redwood: Under paragraph 10(1) of Schedule 11 to the Act, a recognised supervisory body must have inter alia adequate arrangements and resources for the effective enforcement of compliance with its rules. This could entail disciplinary action against individual partners as well as against the audit firm itself.

Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the names of the bodies to which complaints may be made about the behaviour and conduct of the recognised supervisory bodies.

Mr. Redwood: Complaints should be made to the body itself. Paragraph 12 of schedule 11 to the Companies Act 1989 requires a recognised supervisory body for company auditors to have effective arrangements for the investigation of complaints against the body in respect of matters arising out of its functions as a supervisory body. I would expect such arrangements to include independent or lay involvement in the investigation.

In addition, under the Act the Secretary of State will have a continuing role in ensuring that recognised supervisory bodies satisfy the criteria for recognition, and he would therefore have an interest in complaints about their behaviour and conduct.

Financial Reporting Review Panel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation, specifying the time limit within which the financial reporting review panel will be required to respond to a complaint.

Mr. Redwood: It was one of the preconditions for authorising the financial reporting review panel under section 245C of the Companies Act 1985 for the purposes of section 245B of the Act that the panel appeared to my right hon. Friend to have satisfactory procedures for receiving and investigating complaints. The panel's procedures were published on 27 June and a copy has been placed in the library.

Accountancy Practices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to introduce regulations under which all the members of the accountancy profession would have equal access to information relating to the Auditing Standards Board.

Mr. Redwood: It is for the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies and the Auditing Practices Board, as appropriate, to determine their policy on access to information about the board.

Catering

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet the Federation of Catering Equipment Suppliers.

Mr. Leigh: I would consider sympathetically any such request.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases the Insolvency Service has investigated in Yorkshire in the last 12 months for which statistics are kept; for what reasons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Although statistics are not kept on a county basis, all cases except summary administrations are inquired into by official receivers of the Insolvency Service and where the circumstances of the insolvency require are subject to further investigation. As a result of those investigations, during the year ended 31 March 1991, official receivers covering the Yorkshire area, which would also include parts of adjoining counties, submitted 209 reports alleging either the commission of possible criminal offences or recommending application be made for the disqualification of directors whose conduct appears to make them unfit to be concerned in the management of limited companies. As at 30 June 1991, there were 191 cases under investigation by those official receivers.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many officials in the Yorkshire offices of the Insolvency Service are qualified in *(a)* law and *(b)* accountancy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The latest figures available show that 29 officials in the Yorkshire offices of the Insolvency Service have studied for accountancy or allied qualifications. Of these, three are fully qualified, one will shortly be sitting her final examinations and others are still studying. None of these officers has a law degree and such legal expertise as is required is provided by the solicitors division of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Gold and Silver

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect of the single European market in respect of consumer protection on the purchase of items made from gold and silver.

Mr. Leigh: There are no proposals at present to introduce a Communitywide system of marking precious metals so the completion of the single European market

will not in itself have any effect on the legislation currently in force in the United Kingdom and the other member states in this area. It will, however, be necessary at some stage to establish a common regime for precious metals in the European Community. The Government have made it clear that they regard the compulsory marking of articles of precious metals as essential to protect both purchasers and the trade and that the United Kingdom hallmarking system is the best means of ensuring this.

Medicines

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of representations from the manufacturers of generic medicines on the issue of supplementary protection certificates for medicinal products were in favour of the European Commission's proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The representations received from the manufacturers of generic medicines have covered a range of views. None has given unqualified support to the Commission's proposal; indeed, some have not favoured any supplementary protection. Most, however, have recognised the case for some supplementary protection, but have advocated a shorter period or have suggested other provisions to offset the effect of supplementary protection on generics manufacturers.

Whitbread (Tenancy Agreements)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what moves he is making to collect evidence on the way in which Whitbread is using notices to quit to enforce tenancy agreements with licensed victuallers.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has made it clear that the issuing of notices to quit is not necessarily to comply with the beer orders. He has met Whitbread to urge the company to keep the number of notices to quit to an absolute minimum. The renegotiation of tenancy agreements is of course a commercial matter between the landlords and their tenants. However Whitbread has been asked to keep my Department informed of progress, including about the number of notices it sends to tenants.

Premium Rate Phone Services

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Office of Telecommunications about the establishment of a compensation scheme in respect of recorded premium telephone services.

Mr. Redwood: The issue of compensation schemes in respect of premium rate telephone services was considered by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1989. Its report recommended that such a scheme should be introduced for chatlines. This scheme is now in operation and also includes other live services. It was not recommended that it should include recorded services. I have not held any recent discussions with OFTEL about extending the scheme in this way.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Leigh: The Department has no immediate plans for further television advertising. In the current financial year publicity activities in support of the following elements of departmental programmes are expected to cost more than £100,000:

Enterprise Initiative
Single European Market
Export Promotion
Innovation, Research and Development
Managing into the 90s
Manufacturing Practice
Information Technology
Consumer Affairs
Business and the Environment
Inner Cities
The Queen's Awards for Export and Technology
UK Space Interests
Deregulation
Inward Investment (Overseas Publicity)
Staff Recruitment

This list excludes expenditure on the day-to-day marketing of services by the Department's executive agencies.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the number of jobs in the footwear and textile and related industries liable to be lost if the multi-fibre arrangement were abolished.

Mr. Sainsbury: Professor Silberston's independent study for my Department, published in October 1989, estimated that an immediate rather than phased ending of the multi-fibre arrangement could lead to between 16,500 and 33,000 job losses in the United Kingdom textiles and clothing industry, with the lower estimate being the more realistic figure. The study also estimated that the MFA cost United Kingdom consumers £980 million a year at 1988 prices. With minor exceptions, the multi-fibre arrangement does not cover footwear products.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the proposed privatisation of the short-term business of the Export Credits Guarantee Department currently operated by the Insurance Services Group.

Mr. Lilley: Preparatory work for the privatisation has been taking place for some time. Parliament has been informed of progress as the sale of this business is subject to the completion of the passage of the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill through both Houses of Parliament.

An invitation to tender was issued in early March and I have now completed a thorough review of the responses. I have paid particular attention to the bidders' commitment to, and understanding of, the business, the financial robustness of the proposals, the future business plans and the likely acceptability of the bidder to customers and to staff, as well as to price. In the light of

this review, I have selected NCM as the preferred purchaser of the business. This selection is, of course, subject to contract and there will now be a period of detailed negotiations between the Government and the company.

I am confident that the proposed transfer of the business to the private sector will provide United Kingdom exporters with access to a more comprehensive and efficient service than will be possible from within a public sector environment. The Government will continue to provide support for the business through the proposed reinsurance arrangements with the new company, including the "national interest facility" which will continue, subject to satisfactory financial performance, for as long as the Government consider it essential to meet the reasonable needs of exporters.

Simpler Trade Procedures Board

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the operation of his Department's Simpler Trade Procedures Board and its electronic data interchange facility since it was established.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 June 1991]:* The Simpler Trade Procedures Board (SITPRO) is a non-departmental public body supported by my Department. SITPRO's main objectives are the elimination of unnecessary procedural barriers to international trade and the provision of impartial advice to British exporters on procedural aspects of exporting. SITPRO is a world leader in the development of international standards for electronic data interchange.

Czech and Slovak Federal Republic

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what current initiatives are under way sponsored by his Department to increase trade and enterprise in and with the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* Overseas trade services staff in the United Kingdom and Prague provide a range of services to encourage trade with and enterprise in Czechoslovakia. A DTI official is on secondment to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to help administer the know-how fund's schemes to assist longer-term investments in eligible countries, including Czechoslovakia.

Food Imports

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the United Kingdom's trade deficit with the rest of the EEC can be attributed to food imports.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom's net visible trade deficit with the European Community was £10·8 billion in 1990. The visible trade deficit in respect of food, feed and drink was £4·4 billion. It would be wrong to conclude from such figures that 41 per cent. of the deficit could be attributed to food: because some sectors have positive balances, the sum of the deficits will add to more than 100 per cent. Thus the deficit on machinery was 43 per cent., that on motor vehicles was 50 per cent. and that on miscellaneous goods was 27 per cent.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Mr. Miscampbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been given to Bangladesh in the last six months.

Mrs. Chalker: The most recent figures available for British aid to Bangladesh are for the financial year 1989-90 when £52·8 million was disbursed. Within the last six months, our assistance has also included an additional £11·5 million to help the Bangladesh people cope with the effects of the recent cyclone.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mercenaries

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he proposes to ratify the United Nations international convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We did not sign the convention and therefore do not propose to ratify it. Implementation of the convention would require primary legislation. Following the consideration of the whole question by the Diplock committee, we decided not to introduce legislation on mercenaries. We still do not consider that the need for such legislation has been established.

EC Council of Ministers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Fisheries Council will meet on 8 July and Ministers will discuss the 10th, 11th and 12th amendments to the conservation regulations and control methods in the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation regulatory area. Ministers may also discuss North sea and Celtic sea herring and Norwegian sand eels.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 8 July to conduct a multilateral surveillance of the economies of member states. Ministers may consider the formal adoption of the Commission's annual economic report and discuss further the investment services directive. Ministers may discuss European investment bank lending outside the Community with a view to examining the possibility of extending European invesment bank operations to other countries and regions and adopt a Council statement on the Commission's report on European Community fraud.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 15 and 16 July and Ministers will discuss the agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round and food quality. Ministers may also discuss the welfare of animals during transport and reform of the common agricultural policy.

The Internal Market Council will meet on 22 July and Ministers may consider the Dutch presidency's proposed directive on sweeteners in foodstuffs, and three related proposals on the rational use of medicines. Ministers might also discuss the draft regulation to provide for a European company statute, and the second Diplomas Directive.

The Budget Council will meet on 25 July to consider the 1992 preliminary draft budget submitted by the Commission.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 29 and 30 July. Ministers are likely to discuss follow-up to the European Council on 28 and 29 June. Ministers may review the state of negotiations of association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the question of European Community assistance to the Soviet Union. Ministers will discuss the European Community investment partners facility, an instrument designed to promote joint ventures in developing countries. The revision of the Commission's mandate for the negotiations between the European Community and Gulf Co-operation Council on a free trade agreement may be considered. Ministers will review progress in the EC/EFTA negotiations on a European economic area and may also examine EC/Turkey relations. There may also be a ministerial session on the intergovernmental conference on political union on 29 or 30 July.

The Gulf (Disappearances)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 June, *Official Report*, column *635-36*, what information he has received on the disappearance of the British TV journalist Rosanna Della Casa and on the deaths of Nick Della Casa and Charles Maxwell in the Turkish-Iraqi border region, from *(a)* Turkish authorities, *(b)* Iraqi authorities and *(c)* the commission to investigate the incident; and if he will make this information available to their next of kin.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received the full co-operation of the Turkish authorities in our inquiries into the disappearance of Mrs. Rosanna della Casa and the deaths of Mr. Nicholas della Casa and Mr. Charles Maxwell. The Iraqi authorities have also said that they will co-operate. Investigations are continuing with the assistance of Scotland Yard. Next-of-kin are being kept informed at every stage.

"The Gulf Between Us: The Gulf War and Beyond"

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to obtain for his departmental library a copy of the study, "The Gulf Between Us: The Gulf War and Beyond", edited by Victoria Brittain.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Not at present. It will be ordered if it is required.

Arms Control Yearbook

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the 1991 "Yearbook on Arms Control and Environmental Agreements (Verification Report)" edited by J. B. Poole.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes.

National Union of Mineworkers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking in respect of the unauthorised release of information from Government communications headquarters or its outstations on the financial affairs of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 7 June, at column *367*.

Guyana

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government are sending official observers from the United Kingdom to observe the elections in Guyana in October; what support *(a)* the United Nations and *(b)* the Commonwealth are giving in the conduct of the elections; and what contribution Her Majesty's Government are making towards the costs of such assistance.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government of Guyana have indicated that they will allow only official election observers from the Carter centre and the Commonwealth secretariat.

We have agreed to make a substantial contribution towards the costs of the Commonwealth observer mission, in line with the established formula governing contributions from Commonwealth member states to the Commonwealth secretariat's activities.

I have no information that the United Nations will play a role during the elections in Guyana.

A date for the elections has not yet been announced.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no plans to carry out a paid TV advertising campaign. The only domestic publicity campaign costing more than £100,000 that it will carry out is a continuing series of leaflets for British travellers explaining consular services abroad and giving general travel advice. The budget for this campaign in the present financial year is £200,000. Existing TV and radio publicity on the same theme is broadcast free as public service announcements and the FCO has no plans to produce new material at home.

The FCO has budgeted £12·4 million in the present financial year for publicity of various kinds overseas to promote Britain and in support of British Government policies.

Liaison Group of Anti-Apartheid Movements

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's response to the memorandum of the

Liaison Group of Anti-Apartheid Movements of 10 June to the President of the Council of Ministers; and if Her Majesty's Government will support its being discussed at the Luxembourg summit.

Mrs. Chalker: EC Heads of Government discussed South Africa at Luxembourg as the right hon. Member will be aware. They welcomed the important progress made in South Africa towards the abolition of apartheid. They did not agree with the liaison group's recommendation that the EC should suspend its decision to lift some sanctions against South Africa.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *196*, if he will make it his practice to keep central records of the number of public footpaths and public bridleways that have been created or closed to the general public.

Mr. Needham: Under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983 it is the responsibility of each district council to compile and preserve maps and other records of public rights of way in its district. It is not my intention to have the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland duplicate those records.

Maydown Incinerator

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he intends that the hazardous waste incinerator proposed for Maydown, County Londonderry will be no risk to the community or the environment.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 26 June 1991, *Official Report*, column *488*.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further regulations he intends to introduce with respect to the control of substances hazardous to health in the proposed incinerator at Maydown, County Londonderry.

Mr. Needham: If the proposed incinerator came into operation, it would become subject to the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and health and safety regulations made under the order. At present, the Department of Economic Development does not intend to introduce health and safety regulations with specific respect to the proposed facility.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research he has undertaken to determine whether the waste presently earmarked for incineration in the proposed plant at Maydown, Co. Londonderry, could be recycled by the producers of such waste.

Mr. Needham: The extent to which waste can be minimised and recycled will be central in the consideration by any company of the feasibility of an incinerator. High temperature incineration—without doubt, the most costly solution—will be considered only when it is clearly the only appropriate technology for disposal.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evaluation of the site of the proposed incinerator at Maydown will be, or has been, undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other and independent bodies, to determine where in Northern Ireland any emissions would deposit in a wind speed of zero, five, 10, 15, 20, 30 and 40 mph blowing from the south to north west points of the compass.

Mr. Needham: If it decides to proceed with this proposal, Du Pont (UK) Ltd. would be obliged to submit a planning application which would be treated as a major application under article 22 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. The submission of an environmental statement with this application would be mandatory under the terms of EC directive 337/85 and the Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. As part of this environmental statement, the company would be required to carry out detailed mathematical modelling of the incinerator's emissions—a wide range of wind speeds would be used —and their impact on all compass points would be assessed. The company's submission would be critically examined by the alkali and radiochemical inspectorate of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. The Department has no information about the evaluation of this site by other and independent bodies.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to building an incinerator which could deal with non-hazardous and non-toxic waste as well as with hazardous waste.

Mr. Needham: There are significant differences in the requirements for the combustion and destruction of these wastes.

Chemical Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the percentage of chemical waste produced by (1) Du Pont and (2) the rest of Northern Ireland which could be rendered safe by a digestion process.

Mr. Needham: Chemical waste produced by Du Pont and other similar industries in Northern Ireland is, by its nature, not digestible by any known process. The only possible methods of disposal are in hazardous waste landfill or by high temperature incineration.

Harbour Improvements

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken to improve the harbours at Church Bay, Rathlin and at Ballycastle, and to promote a better ferry service.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) has taken the following steps to improve the ferry service between Ballycastle and Rathlin:

(a) Negotiations are under way with the ferry operators regarding the provison of an annual subsidy to ensure the continuance of the serviceand for a grant toward the improvement of the ferries, particularly as regards passenger safety and comfort.

(b) Work is being carried out this year to improve acces s to Rathlin Harbour. Taking into account investigations at Ballycastle Harbour total expenditure this year will be over £300,000.

(c) Plans to provide safe berthing at Ballycastle and to deepen the harbour at, and channel to, Rathlin Harbour have been agreed with the Moyle District Council which owns the harbours. These works have been estimated at almost £4 million and, subject to the availability of finance, are schedule for completion in 1993.

These actions will secure the ferry service in the short term and will allow the introduction of a modern service. The form of such a service has not yet been decided.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give for each available year from 1978, the energy consumption, broken down by fuel, of the buildings occupied by his Department, expressing the figures in *(a)* cash terms, *(b)* 1990-91 money terms and *(c)* units of consumption for electricity in kilowatt hours, gas in therms, liquid fuel in litres and solid fuel in tonnes; and if he will give the square footage of accommodation to which these figures relate.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 3 June 1991]:* The energy information requested for the years prior to 1983-84 and the square footage information prior to 1986-87 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. From 1983-84 onwards, the energy consumption and costs for the Northern Ireland Government office estate, broken down by fuel together with the square footage of accommodation to which it relates, is as follows:—

	Electricity	*Oil*	*Gas*	*Area sq ft million*
1983-84				
Consumption	25·5 million Kwh	4·25 million litres	72 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,140,000	£680,000	£58,000	
1990-91 prices	£1,537,359	£717,053	£70,931	
1984-85				
Consumption	27·2 million Kwh	4·65 million litres	79 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,065,000	£684,000	£58,000	
1990-91 prices	£1,408,056	£667,843	£69,540	
1985-86				
Consumption	29·6 million Kwh	4·83 million litres	61 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,443,000	£863,000	£51,000	
1990-91 prices	£1,834,437	£851,126	£59,262	
1986-87				
Consumption	36·5 million Kwh	5·21 million litres	36 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,518,000	£534,000	£36,000	2·87
1990-91 prices	£1,929,783	£658,321	£41,491	
1987-88				
Consumption	33·8 million Kwh	5·14 million litres	47 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,563,000	£437,000	£33,000	2·92
1990-91 prices	£1,986,991	£579,284	£40,035	
1988-89				
Consumption	33·6 million Kwh	5·63 million litres	8 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,611,000	£396,000	£3,000	2·92
1990-91 prices	£1,878,910	£514,642	£3,162	
1989-90				
Consumption	33·18 million Kwh	5·2 million litres	25 Kth	
Cash prices	£1,622,000	£469,000	£11,000	2·96
1990-91 prices	£1,767,980	£534,660	£11,550	
1990-91				
Consumption		Not yet available		
Cash prices (including VAT)	£1,857,000	£588,000	—	3·22
1990-91 prices	£1,857,000	£588,000	—	

Oil and electricity were subject to VAT from 1 July 1990.

WALES

Rural Affairs Department

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received advocating the setting up of a rural affairs department in the Welsh Office; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No statistics are kept of representations on this subject, but I am aware of a small number of representations over recent years.

Because of the multi-functional nature of my right hon. Friend's responsibilities, the Welsh Office is well placed to take an overview of different policies as they affect rural affairs. There is also a great deal of collaboration between the various parts of the Welsh Office and between the Department and other agencies and bodies concerned with rural affairs.

Teachers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of teacher vacancies and vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post in Wales *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by main teaching subject in each year from 1986;

(2) if he will publish a value showing *(a)* the number of teacher vacancies and *(b)* vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post in each county in Wales during each year from 1986;

(3) if he will publish the results of his Department's latest survey into teacher vacancies in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest survey on teacher vacancies was carried out in January 1991. The results are included in the following tables which show the number of teacher vacancies in all schools and the number of vacancies by subject in secondary schools between 1986 and 1991. Comparable information for the primary sector is not available for 1986 and 1987. Details of teacher vacancies by subject in primary schools and by grade are not held centrally.

The number of unfilled teacher vacancies and teacher vacancies as a proportion of full-time teaching posts

Primary schools

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
1988									
Number of vacancies	8	6	52	1	69	6	2	0	144
Percentage of full-time teachers	0·56	0·39	2·97	0·10	2·64	1·10	0·13	0·00	1·20
1989									
Number of vacancies	17	4	46	8	90	5	11	0	181
Percentage of full-time teachers	1·18	0·25	2·58	0·81	3·56	0·94	0·70	0·00	1·50
1990									
Number of vacancies	31	3	33	26	81	10	3	0	187
Percentage of full-time teachers	2·14	0·18	1·83	2·64	3·27	1·81	0·18	0·00	1·53
1991									
Number of vacancies	5	8	81	21	108	5	16	28	272
Percentage of full-time teachers	0·34	0·48	4·50	2·17	4·12	0·93	0·98	1·69	2·20

Secondary Schools

Year	*Clwyd*	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
1986									
Number of vacancies	3	20	26	13	41	0	6	72	181
Percentage of FT teachers	0·16	1·25	1·18	1·02	1·47	0·00	0·34	4·01	1·30
1987									
Number of vacancies	2	8	3	9	34	0	0	13	69
Percentage of FT teachers	0·11	0·50	0·14	0·72	1·26	0·00	0·00	0·75	0·51
1988									
Number of vacancies	2	4	25	11	32	11	1	5	91
Percentage of FT teachers	0·11	0·26	1·23	0·92	1·21	1·96	0·06	0·29	0·69
1989									
Number of vacancies	9	3	15	16	35	11	4	12	105
Percentage of FT teachers	0·52	0·20	0·77	1·36	1·35	1·94	0·25	0·72	0·82
1990									
Number of vacancies	11	11	46	22	38	10	10	11	159
Percentage of FT teachers	0·64	0·72	2·46	1·92	1·62	1·77	0·60	0·68	1·28
1991									
Number of vacancies	14	12	11	20	69	9	7	17	159
Percentage of FT teachers	0·84	0·78	0·60	1·83	2·92	1·63	0·42	1·07	1·30

Unfilled teacher vacancies and teacher vacancies as a proportion of full-time teachers in secondary schools by subject taught

Subject	*1986*		*1987*		*1988*		*1989*		*1990*		*1991*	
	Number	*Proportion of posts Per cent.*	*Number*	*Proportion of posts Per cent.*	*Number*	*Proportion of posts Per cent.*	*Number*	*Proportion of posts Per cent.*	*Number*	*Proportion of posts Per cent.*	*Number*	*Proportion of posts Per cent.*
Mathematics	21	1·31	7	0·45	6	0·40	8	0·54	18	1·25	15	1·06
Computer studies	7	2·90	5	2·13	3	1·32	1	0·45	2	0·93	1	0·47
Chemistry	4	0·96	2	0·50	0	0·00	3	0·79	4	1·08	5	1·37
Physics	7	1·58	4	0·93	3	0·72	6	1·48	3	0·76	5	1·29
Biology	2	0·39	1	0·20	4	0·82	2	0·42	1	0·22	2	0·44
Other Science	6	0·86	3	0·44	7	1·06	4	0·62	8	1·29	12	1·96
French	11	1·57	4	0·69	5	0·76	13	2·02	8	1·28	12	1·95

Subject	1986 Number	1986 Proportion of posts Per cent.	1987 Number	1987 Proportion of posts Per cent.	1988 Number	1988 Proportion of posts Per cent.	1989 Number	1989 Proportion of posts Per cent.	1990 Number	1990 Proportion of posts Per cent.	1991 Number	1991 Proportion of posts Per cent.
German	0	0·00	0	0·00	1	0·71	0	0·00	0	0·00	2	1·51
French/German	1	0·00	1	0·00	1	0·00	0	0·00	5	0·00	3	0·00
Spanish	0	0·00	1	3·79	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00
Welsh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	22	0·00
Other Languages[1]	8	n.a.	2	n.a.	7	n.a.	6	n.a.	16	n.a.	6	n.a.
English	15	1·06	10	0·73	14	1·05	12	0·92	27	2·13	8	0·64
Drama	4	3·95	2	2·04	1	1·05	1	1·07	1	1·11	1	1·12
History	10	1·44	1	0·15	1	0·15	4	0·62	7	1·13	1	0·16
Social Studies	5	3·51	0	0·00	1	0·74	2	1·53	0	0·00	0	0·00
Geography	13	1·74	4	0·55	3	0·43	4	0·58	6	0·90	7	1·06
Religious Education	4	0·85	1	0·22	0	0·00	1	0·23	4	0·95	3	0·72
CDT	16	2·00	1	0·13	7	0·93	7	0·95	7	0·98	5	0·71
Commerce/Business	5	1·68	5	1·74	3	1·07	2	0·73	7	2·64	0	0·00
Art/Light Craft	4	0·62	1	0·16	4	0·66	1	0·17	2	0·35	3	0·53
Home Economics/ N'work	8	1·03	2	0·27	4	0·55	4	0·56	1	0·14	7	1·02
Music	5	1·19	3	0·73	2	0·50	2	0·52	6	1·60	11	2·97
Physical Education	11	1·26	3	0·35	3	0·36	3	0·20	6	0·77	7	0·91
Remedial	11	2·02	6	1·14	5	0·97	1	0·20	11	2·27	5	1·04
Careers	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00
Other main subjects	1	0·22	0	0·00	1	0·23	5	1·17	1	0·24	2	0·49
Combined subjects	2	22·97	0	0·00	1	12·18	2	24·98	0	0·00	0	0·00
Sub total	181	—	69	—	87	—	94	—	151	—	117	—
Head vacancies[3]	—	—	—	—	2	—	4	—	2	—	4	—
Deputy Head vacancies[2]	—	—	—	—	2	—	7	—	6	—	10	
Total vacancies	181	—	69	—	91	—	105	—	159	—	131	—

[1] Prior to 1991 the number of vacancies for teachers taking Welsh was included with those vacancies for teachers taking other languages. LEAs also reported teacher vacancies for teachers required to teach two languages in this category.

[2] Separately identified figures for heads and deputy heads were collected for the first time in 1988 possibly resulting in undercounting in earlier years. But to the extent that they were recorded prior to 1988 they will have been allocated to a teaching subject, slightly inflating the number of vacancies in individual subjects relative to their 1988 value.

Notes:

1. Vacancies are recorded for full-time permanent appointments or full-time appointments of at least one term's duration which an authority intends to fill or to which it has unsuccessfully attempted to make such an appointment.
2. The number of teachers is provided by LEAs on the form 618G and relates to all teachers working full-time. The number of teaching posts has been estimated by applying the proportion of teachers in each subject obtained from the 1989 Secondary School Staffing Survey to the number of full-time teachers in post in each year.

Policy Reviews

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to publish the results, or a report thereof, of his quinquennial review of the work of the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The conclusions of the reviews will be published and these will be placed in the Library of the House.

Trading Standards

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his proposals for the future of the organisation of the trading standards service in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The organisation of the trading standards service will be a matter for consideration in the context of any decision to restructure local government in Wales.

Craft Industry

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of how public funding provided in 1990-91 to aid the craft industry in Wales via the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Wales Craft Council was spent; how many businesses benefited directly therefrom; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The financial year 1990-91 was the final year of the three-year Craft Initiative. Details of how public funding provided to aid the craft industry in Wales was spent during the initiative, and the number of businesses that benefited in that period, were provided in the evaluation of the initiative. A copy of this has been placed in the Library of the House.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the changes in the incidence of unemployment in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the area covered by the valleys programme in each of the past 30 months for which figures are available.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is contained in the following table:

Unemployment in the programme for the Valleys area and Wales

	Valleys		Wales	
	Total	Absolute monthly change	Total	Absolute monthly change
1988				
November	30,354	—	115,768	—
December	30,292	−62	114,533	−1,235

	Valleys		Wales	
	Total	*Absolute monthly change*	*Total*	*Absolute monthly change*
1989				
January	30,963	671	116,245	1,712
February	29,812	−1,151	112,044	−4,201
March	29,095	−717	107,696	−4,348
April	28,543	−552	103,188	−4,508
May	27,411	−1,132	[illegible]	−5,370
June	26,279	−1,132	92,804	−5,014
July	26,291	12	93,272	468
August	25,714	−577	91,113	−2,159
September	25,928	214	90,594	−519
October	24,091	−1,837	86,514	−4,080
November	23,296	−795	85,658	−856
December	23,677	381	87,161	1,503
1990				
January	24,764	1,087	90,349	3,188
February	24,183	−581	88,851	−1,498
March	23,797	−386	86,638	−2,213
April	23,474	−323	84,557	−2,081
May	22,922	−522	81,194	−3,363
June	22,417	−505	79,103	−2,091
July	23,146	729	83,202	4,099
August	23,330	184	84,609	1,407
September	23,647	317	85,858	1,249
October	23,411	−236	86,030	172
November	24,052	641	89,923	3,893
December	25,559	1,507	95,662	5,739
1991				
January	27,077	1,518	101,452	5,790
February	27,746	669	104,889	3,437
March	28,995	1,249	108,049	3,160
April	30,309	1,314	110,504	2,455
May	30,274	−35	110,237	−267

Source: Employment Department.

Standard Assessment Tasks

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those who have made representations concerning the implementation of standard assessment tasks; and whether he intends to revise them following their representations.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As at 27 June the following representations had been received.

	Number of Representations
Teachers	10
School governing bodies	15
Parents	[1]8
Teacher associations and unions	3

[1] Plus 1 petition containing 58 signatures.

Many of the correspondents provide constructive comment on the assessment arrangements and these have been forwarded to the School Examinations and Assessment Council, which is currently undertaking a wide-ranging evaluation of this year's exercise.

Employment Action Team

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the employment action scheme will begin in Wales; and in what travel-to-work areas the scheme will be implemented.

Sir Wyn Roberts: "Employment Action" is due to be introduced in the autumn. All training and enterprise councils will shortly be invited to enter into negotiations with the Employment Department about the scale and nature of local provision.

Royal Welch Fusiliers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the future of the Royal Welch Fusiliers; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have received 59 written representations calling for the continuation of the Royal Welch Fusiliers in their present form. We have also received a number of personal representations.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was raised by local authorities in Wales in 1990-91 using their discretionary powers to raise £5 per head of adult population, in areas where there is a single tier of principal local authority, and £2·50 per head of adult population, in areas where there are two administrative tiers; and if he has made any assumptions for the likely yield under this power for 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not collected centrally.

Local Authority Usable Receipts

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate for local authority usable receipts in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Local authorities estimate that at 1 April 1991 they had £40 million of usable accumulated capital receipts. In addition, they forecast that the usable part of receipts received in 1991-92 will be £34 million. No equivalent figures are available for later periods.

Planning Applications

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning applications, rejected by local authorities, that were subsequently approved by Welsh Office inspectors on appeal, there were in each Welsh planning area in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*[1]1989*	*[1]1990*
Clwyd										
Alyn and Deeside	4	2	4	3	8	8	9	7	5	11
Colwyn	9	8	8	15	14	9	6	5	10	9
Delyn	3	2	4	5	3	2	5	10	12	10
Glyndwr	3	2	4	5	7	5	5	6	4	9
Rhuddlan	6	6	10	13	13	12	9	10	11	12
Wrexham	7	9	8	8	11	10	10	14	8	13

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	[1]1989	[1]1990
Dyfed										
Carmathen	6	1	8	3	3	5	4	9	7	19
Ceredigion	5	5	2	1	8	8	7	8	11	10
Dinefwr	2	1	1	2	6	6	2	3	5	10
Llanelli	9	2	5	4	7	3	9	9	9	15
Preseli	1	0	3	3	4	2	2	5	1	2
South Pembrokeshire	7	3	6	4	4	5	3	2	6	12
Gwent										
Blaenau Gwent	3	1	1	2	4	2	1	3	6	7
Islwyn	3	1	1	5	6	6	6	5	6	7
Monmouth	16	17	10	9	14	12	12	12	18	28
Newport	4	7	7	6	10	12	8	6	10	25
Torfaen	4	4	3	7	10	11	6	7	6	13
Gwynedd										
Aberconwy	4	6	10	5	14	15	6	14	12	25
Arfon	5	4	2	4	9	8	7	3	2	4
Dwyfor	6	6	5	5	6	3	9	9	13	16
Meirionydd	5	5	6	4	3	9	1	4	0	0
Ynys Môn	15	17	12	10	11	17	23	17	18	27
Mid Glamorgan										
Cynon Valley	1	5	1	4	2	3	3	3	7	4
Merthyr Tydfil	1	7	2	2	1	5	4	4	4	3
Ogwr	13	4	8	9	3	5	6	8	14	22
Rhondda	4	5	4	1	3	7	0	5	7	12
Rhymney Valley	4	5	4	5	3	1	4	7	5	5
Taff Ely	9	6	7	7	8	13	6	10	10	23
Powys										
Brecknock	1	1	7	6	6	9	6	6	3	3
Montgomery	3	5	2	6	1	3	2	5	5	9
Radnor	2	2	0	0	3	4	1	4	0	4
South Glamorgan										
Cardiff	15	10	22	18	31	20	21	21	36	41
Vale of Glamorgan	24	20	17	15	13	22	21	21	32	27
West Glamorgan										
Port Talbot (Formely Afan)	2	4	2	0	1	1	1	1	4	4
Lliw Valley	6	4	11	8	7	10	6	5	4	9
Neath	2	4	4	2	2	2	5	3	5	7
Swansea	22	14	23	19	23	23	10	22	30	32

[1]Excludes appeals within National Parks.

National parks	1989	1990
Snowdonia	9	7
Brecon Beacons	4	8
Pembrokeshire Coast	6	4

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office does not plan to run any television advertising campaigns.

The Department will run three publicity campaigns in 1991-92 costing more than £100,000:

Enterprise Wales
Road Safety
Drug and Alcohol Misuse

ENERGY

Electricity Act

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects codes of practice to be published and complaints procedures to be established as required by the Electricity Act 1989; and what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that the Director General of Electricity Supply has discharged his duties with respect to consumer protection arrangements envisaged in that Act.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand from the Office of Electricity Regulation that most of the regional electricity companies' codes of practice and procedures have now been approved by the Director General of Electricity Supply, and that the remainder should reach that stage shortly. I meet the director general regularly to discuss all aspects of the regulation of the electricity industry and am confident that he is discharging his duties effectively. Consumers will benefit directly from the challenging standards of performance on customer service set by the director general which come into force today. These important initiatives are a practical example of improvements in service to customers of the kind which are at the heart of the citizens' charter proposals.

Wave Energy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to remove the responsibility for developing a United Kingdom wave energy programme from the Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Moynihan: No. Responsibility rests with my Department for the general research development and demonstration programme for renewable energy technologies; this includes wave energy. The energy technology support unit, based at the Harwell laboratory of the Atomic Energy Authority, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme and reports directly to my Department on the performance of its work.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the average length of time taken to process a claim by a network installer under the Government's home energy efficiency scheme; and what is the accepted performance target for such work.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A proportion of cases are subject to technical monitoring and payment is only made once work has been found to reach the required standards. My Department's contract with the Energy Action Grants Agency—EAGA—requires it for at least 90 per cent. of all cases to approve valid claims or reject incorrect claims for grant money made by a network installer under the home energy efficiency scheme within 15 working days of receipt. The EAGA is currently meeting this target.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he has taken to ensure that arrangements under the home energy efficiency scheme are satisfactory and that adequate resources are being made available for both network installers and contractors to undertake their work.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Initial experience in operating the scheme has confirmed that it meets a real need and is being well received. The changes to HEES that I recently announced will further promote standards and protect clients. I am satisfied that the funding available is adequate to treat some 200,000 homes in the current financial year.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the cash value of the non-fossil fuel obligation in the year to date in terms of the additional payment to Nuclear Electric for the cost of generation and the remainder of the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Details of premium payments made by the regional electricity companies to specific generators contracted within the non-fossil fuel obligation —NFFO—are commercially confidential. However, the Director General of Electricity Supply has announced that in 1990-91 receipts from the fossil fuel levy, available for financing NFFO qualifying arrangements, amounted to £1,175 million.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the total megawatt capacity of bids for entrance in the second tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation; and how these are split between the categories of renewable energies that he is considering.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I regret that I am unable to give the information requested, because to do so might prejudice the operation of the competitive tendering procedure that has been adopted by the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency Ltd. for selecting the projects to be contracted under the proposed Renewables Order 1991.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any proposals for disaggregating the nuclear from the non-nuclear segments of the non-fossil fuel obligation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: For practical reasons, and to reflect the Government's policy of introducing additional tranches of renewables capacity during the 1990s, the non-fossil fuel obligations in respect of nuclear and renewables have been made under separate orders. However, my right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce separate levies for nuclear and renewables, which would be cumbersome and inefficient.

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what advance payments of nuclear levy have been made to Nuclear Electric in respect of the Sizewell B nuclear power station during its construction phase;

(2) what arrangements he has made for the payment of nuclear levy in respect of Sizewell B *(a)* before it is fuelled, *(b)* during its phasing-in period and *(c)* in operation at full capacity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Details of premium payments made by the Regional Electricity Companies to specific generators contracted within the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation, including Nuclear Electrict plc, are commercially confidential.

Non-fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has to review the 1998 terminal date for the application of the non-fossil fuel levy, or any subsection of it.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I are confident that the regional electricity companies have the flexibilities they need to offer generators acceptable contracts under the proposed Renewables Order 1991. My Department's forthcoming renewables review will provide an opportunity to consider the longer-term implications.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has a continuing programme of publicity to promote energy efficiency, including a joint campaign with the Department of the Environment on the environment and home energy efficiency, the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry and renewable sources of energy. None of these campaigns will involve television advertising in the current year.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Daresbury Laboratory

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the investment in total in current values to set up and establish the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury as an operating centre.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The final capital cost of the nuclear structure facility was £13·6 million at 1980 price levels. This corresponds to £26·3 million at current prices.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to *(a)* the capital costs, *(b)* the setting-up costs, *(c)* the commissioning costs and *(d)* the back-up costs of the LINAC facility at Daresbury laboratory.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The equipment forming the LINAC facility was transferred from the university of Oxford and installed at Daresbury laboratory at a cost of £1,235,000. Associated work to set up beam lines and new laboratories cost a further £880,000. The contribution by Daresbury laboratory's own staff in installing and setting up the facility cannot be separately disaggregated.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will construct a table showing the capital investments in the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury, the year of those investments and the originally expected usable lifetimes of the major items involved.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The capital cost of the original nuclear structure facility was £13·6 million at 1980 prices. A programme of enhancements has been carried out since then and contained within the annual NSF operating budget which has varied within the range of £5·5 million to £6·6 million. The superconducting linear accelerator (LINAC) was transferred and installed at the NSF in 1990 at a capital cost of £1·2 million.

Although the NSF could be sustained in operation with the necessary maintenance for a further 10 years or so, SERC's 1989 corporate plan envisaged a change of scientific direction in this field from the mid-1990s. The NSF was expected to sustain a high quality programme of nuclear structure research at least until then.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the expected usable lifetime of the LINAC at Daresbury laboratory; and when it was first used.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Following transfer of the equipment from Oxford university to the nuclear structure facility, the LINAC was inaugurated in November 1990.

Although the LINAC facility could be sustained in operation with increasing maintenance costs for 10 years or so, SERC's 1989 corporate plan envisaged a change of scientific direction in the field of nuclear structure physics from the mid to late 1990s. The LINAC facility was expected to sustain a high quality performance at least until then.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how the SERC intends to put into action its plans to maintain the nuclear structure facility at the forefront of low-energy, nuclear physics worldwide as outlined in "The Laboratories in the 1990s".

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to him on 25 June 1991, *Official Report*, column *444*.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the LINAC at Daresbury laboratory was inaugurated; and by whom.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The superconducting linear accelerator (LINAC) was inaugurated on 26 November 1990 by SERC's chairman, Sir Mark Richmond.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evaluation of the quality of the work emerging from the use of the LINAC at Daresbury laboratory SERC intends to undertake; and whether such evaluation will be published.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understand that the SERC has no plans to conduct such a study.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the capital asset value of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As a unique scientific facility with a single use, the nuclear structure facility has no meaningful commercial or market value.

"The Laboratories in the 1990s"

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the report "The Laboratories in the 1990s" by SERC was submitted to him.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department saw the report that went to the SERC council in July 1990 and received the published version in June this year.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how the SERC

intends to put into action its plans for other laboratories to build on its international roles as outlined in "The Laboratories in the 1990s".

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information on the SERC's plans is contained in its coroporate plans and other material made available to the Department.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date the SERC report "The Laboratories in the 1990s" was generally distributed; and what its costs of publication were.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The cost to SERC of publishing the report was £2,682. It was distributed by it earlier this month.

Scientific Research

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the expenditure in each of the last five years, from his departmental vote on the dual funding system for scientific research; and what is the provision for this in the current year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Under the dual support system for funding scientific research, universities receive funds from the Department's vote both through institutional funding from UFC and specific project grants from the research councils.

Funding from the UFC in support of research council projects is not separately identified in the UFC's allocations to universities. The estimated total UFC funding spent on scientific research over the period 1986-87 to 1989-90 was:

	£ million
1986-87	655
1987-88	695
1988-89	725
1989-90	785

Estimates for 1990-91 and 1991-92 taking account of outturn data on university spending are not yet available. However, the Government's plans provided for a year-on-year increase of some 10 per cent. in the total available public funding for universities through UFC recurrent grant and publicly funded tuition fees in each year. Within their overall allocations, it is for individual institutions to determine their spending on teaching and different types of research.

Actual spending by research councils on grants for research in universities and other bodies was as follows. The figures include grants for research in polytechnics and other higher education institutions, expenditure on interdisciplinary research centres and a small number of grants to other bodies which are outside the dual support system.

£ thousands

	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
AFRC	6,875	7,618	9,080	15,001
ESRC	12,652	14,205	15,502	18,950
MRC	35,164	38,073	44,512	46,742
NERC	4,664	6,924	6,794	8,624
SERC	99,507	121,811	123,010	151,384
Total	158,862	188,631	198,898	240,701

Source: Annual Appropriation Accounts.

Estimated total grants in 1990-91 and 1991-92 on the same basis are as follows:

£ thousands

	1990-91	1991-92
AFRC	15,679	16,172
ESRC	21,378	24,117
MRC	57,050	59,067
NERC	12,237	11,394
SERC	168,167	168,330
Total	275,167	279,330

Source: Supply Estimates 1991-92.

Teachers

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the average numbers of teaching staff in *(a)* nursery and primary schools, *(b)* middle schools and *(c)* secondary schools for each size of school, according to the group sizes defined in the "School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document".

Mr. Fallon: A table showing the average numbers of teachers in maintained schools in England by group size follows. The group sizes shown are those introduced with effect from 1 January 1991.

Average numbers of full-time equivalent qualified teachers in maintained nursery, primary, middle and secondary schools in England by group size

January 1990

Maintained School	*Average number*
Nursery and Primary	
Group 1	4·3
Group 2	10·4
Group 3	17·6
Group 4	26·8
Group 5	—
Group 6	—
Middle	
Group 1	7·9
Group 2	13·1
Group 3	21·4
Group 4	35·0
Group 5	—
Group 6	—
Secondary	
Group 1	—
Group 2	14·8
Group 3	25·3
Group 4	37·4
Group 5	56·1
Group 6	80·5

Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of *(a)* nursery and primary schools, *(b)* middle schools and *(c)* secondary schools in each region by size, according to the group sizes defined in the "School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document".

Mr. Fallon: A table showing the numbers of maintained schools in each region in England according to group size follows. The group sizes shown are those introduced with effect from 1 January 1991.

Numbers of maintained nursery, primary, middle and secondary schools in England by region and group size January 1990

	North	Yorkshire and Humberside	North West	East Midlands	West Midlands	East Anglia	Greater London	Other South East	South West	England
Nursery and Primary										
Group 1	565	750	780	747	661	456	235	1,442	1,024	6,660
Group 2	767	1,137	1,759	930	1,229	370	1,586	2,181	936	10,895
Group 3	111	154	242	129	230	54	278	281	103	1,582
Group 4	—	2	5	1	6	—	1	1	1	17
Group 5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Group 6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middle										
Group 1	3	25	—	—	8	3	2	7	3	51
Group 2	40	167	1	15	73	52	44	261	23	676
Group 3	26	69	6	20	42	42	17	103	26	351
Group 4	—	2	—	5	—	2	—	3	3	15
Group 5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Group 6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Secondary										
Group 1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Group 2	4	2	7	6	2	—	1	2	9	33
Group 3	9	17	21	49	22	9	11	17	14	169
Group 4	59	94	144	108	131	52	120	200	94	1,002
Group 5	138	171	267	136	218	58	277	447	167	1,879
Group 6	23	60	60	35	37	21	25	75	34	370

Student Loans

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to place in the Library each month the number of student loans outstanding and the total value of the amount owed.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am informed by the Student Loans Company Ltd. that, at 31 May 1991, 136,516 loans were outstanding. The total value of the amount owed was £54,109,897. Figures as at the end of June and each succeeding calendar month will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

Training

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students there are in *(a)* non-vocational and *(b)* leisure-related classes, who have been given work release by employers to attend those classes for training purposes.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The number of students in PCFC institutions and further education colleges, excluding adult education centres, in England who were released by employers to attend identified non-vocational and leisure related classes was some 400 in 1989-90.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend launched a teacher recruitment campaign this morning which will include advertising on television.

Other publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 which are intended to be carried out in the current financial year are:

— a campaign to provide parents with information about changes in the education system; and

— the professional, industrial and commercial updating (PICKUP) programme which continues to support and encourage colleges, polytechnics and universities to improve and increase their provision to meet the training needs of employers and their employees.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Sitting Hours

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answers of 25 March, *Official Report*, column *607-8*, what proposals he had for reviewing the hours of sitting of the House.

Mr. McGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the announcement I made to the House on Thursday 27 June at col. 1161.

HEALTH

Mental Illness

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of beds available to the national health service for the treatment of mental illness in 1980 and in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available centrally, there were 59,290 average daily available mental illness beds in national health service hospitals in England, compared with 87,396 in 1980.

The numbers of mentally ill patients staying in hospital for long periods has been falling since the mid-1970s. This is true not only for England but for most other developed countries. Over the last 30 years it has become clear from research that less reliance need be placed on in-patient care and better results can be achieved using more day-patient and community care. Additionally the advent of the major tranquillisers in the mid-1950s enabled many patients who previously needed long-term in-patient care to benefit from care on an out-patient basis.

This has been reflected in the steady improvement in community-based services for mentally ill people in the past 10 years. Gross spending on hospital and community health services for mentally ill people increased by 27 per cent. in real terms between 1979-80 and 1989-90 to £1,661·7 million. Gross spending on local authority social services for the mentally ill has increased substantially and will be further increased by the mental illness specific grant which came into effect on 1 April 1991. The number of community psychiatric nurses has more than trebled from 1,083 in 1981 to 3,380 in 1989.

The number of mental illness day hospital places in England increased from 15,300 in 1981 to over 19,000 in 1988. Total provision of day centre places for mentally ill people, including places in mixed centres and those made available to local authorities by voluntary bodies, rose from 7,600 in 1981 to 10,400 places in 1988.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the British position where the European Commission's proposal for a Council regulation aimed at improving the protection of innovation in the pharmaceutical industry is concerned.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs gave my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) on 15 April at columns *32-33*. We will continue to take part constructively in the discussions with other member states to reach an acceptable outcome.

Health Authority Spending

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the spending per head of population served by Warrington district health authority in the latest available year; and what is the figure on the most nearly comparable basis for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Dorrell: Figures for spending per head of resident population for 1989-90, the latest year available, are shown in the table:

Revenue expenditure per head of resident population—hospital and community health services (HCHS)[1]

	£
Warrington District Health Authority	305
England—average for all district health authorities	271
United Kingdom	285

[1] Includes hospital, community health, patient transport (i.e. ambulance) blood transfusion and other services.

Sources

(a) 1989-90 annual accounts of district health authorities in England and those of the analogous health authorities and boards in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—as submitted to the central health departments in each country.

(b) Mid-year estimates of populations—1989 (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys).

Notes to the Table

1. Expenditure by regional health authorities, special health authorities and all capital expenditure on HCHS is excluded. Expenditure on family health services (which cannot be strictly attributed to particular districts) and expenditure on personal social services (which in Northern Ireland is accounted for by Health and Social Services Boards) is also excluded.

2. Comparisons between the figures are influenced by a number of factors including:

(a) people travel across district boundaries for treatment and resource allocations reflect the pattern of service provision locally;

(b) the population figures used make no allowance for people resident in particular districts who receive treatment in others or for differences in morbidity and the age/sex structure of particular populations.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient waiting lists were in (i) England, (ii) the Mersey regional health authority and (iii) Warrington district health authority in 1979 and at the latest available date.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested on in-patients is given in the table. Out-patient waiting list information is not collected centrally. It is the time individual patients wait that matters, not the total numbers on the list. Numbers waiting more than one year for in-patient treatment have fallen by 7 per cent. in England since 1979. In Mersey they have fallen by 73 per cent. and in Warrington by 97 per cent. in the same period.

Numbers treated have increased since 1979. In 1989-90 in the order of 38 per cent. more in-patients were treated than in 1979 in England as a whole, 40 per cent. more were treated in Mersey region and 65 per cent. more in Warrington health authority.

Numbers on in-patient waiting list 1979 and 1989-90

	England	*Mersey RHA*	*Warrington DHA*
March 1979[1]	752,422	41,103	3,360
September 1990[1]	705,706	29,609	1,756

[1] Figures exclude self-deferred cases.

Source:

SM12; 1979 SBH 203 return.
1990 KH06, KH07, KH07A returns.

Medical Consultations

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients paid for initial consultations for medical problems for each year from 1985 to date, both as a number and a percentage; and how many received further treatment from the NHS.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Student Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority for the last 12 months, the number of national health service student nurses *(a)* who have graduated as registered general nurses and *(b)* the number still unemployed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on the number of student nurses graduating from training in the last 12 months and not yet employed in the NHS is not collected centrally.

The numbers completing first level training in each region during the year ended 31 March 1991 are shown in the table:

Region	Number
Northern	1,215
Yorkshire	1,284
Trent	1,667
East Anglian	604
North West Thames	1,227
North East Thames	1,882
South East Thames	1,303
South West Thames	1,028
Wessex	1,000
Oxford	646
South Western	954
West Midlands	1,747
Mersey	1,019
North Western	1,652

Source: English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress of the HIV/AIDS team inquiry at Leeds general infirmary.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are not aware of such an inquiry taking place.

Grants

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the voluntary organisations that have received grants, and the level of grant received, up to the present date under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 within the current financial period 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: To date, approval has been given for the payment in 1991-92 under the section 64 general scheme of grants totalling £12,337,844. Details are shown in the table.

Grants approved to voluntary organisations in 1991-92 Under Section 64 General Scheme

Organisation	£
Access Committee (England)	135,000
Action for Dyphasic Adults	29,172
Action for Victims of Medical Accidents	20,000
Action on Smoking and Health	241,500
Adfam	18,375
Age Concern	267,000
Aid for Children with Tracheostomies	5,278
Aids Ahead	40,000
Aids and Housing Project	29,000
Aids Care Education and Training (ACET)	150,000
Alcohol Concern	583,000
Alzheimers Disease Society	130,000
Amarant Trust	13,000
Amnesia Association	8,000
Arthritis Care	15,000
Association for Stammerers	15,000
Association for the Psychiatric Study of Adolescents	40,000
Association of Disabled Professionals	3,000
Association of Professions for Mentally Handicapped	5,000
Association of Residential Care	20,000
Babylife Support Systems (BLISS)	11,000
Barnardos	65,000
Black HIV/Aids Network (BAHN)	40,000
Bobath Centre	20,000
Body Positive	40,000
Breakthrough Trust	40,000
Breast Care and Mastectomy Association of Great Britain	31,900
British Association for Services to the Elderly	12,000
British Association for Study and Prevention of Child Abuse (BASPCAN)	27,500
British Association of Cancer United Patients (BACUP)	11,000
British Association of the Hard of Hearing	60,000
British Council of Organisations of Disabled People	30,000
British Institute of Industrial Therapy	25,000
British Institute of Mental Handicap	35,000
British Kidney Patient Association	25,000
British Organ Donor Society	5,000
Brook Advisory Centres	65,000
Cancer Help Centre	25,000
Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund	20,250
Cancerlink	11,000
Care and Repair Ltd.	37,743
Carers National Association	97,500
Catholic Child Welfare Council	2,500
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	42,200
Centre for Accessible Environment	70,000
Chest Heart and Stroke Association	71,891
Child Care	216,500
Child Poverty Action Group	18,000
Child Psychotherapy Trust	15,000
Childline	82,200
Childrens Legal Centre	45,000
Childrens Society	66,500
Chinese Health Information Centre	19,500
Community Hygiene Concern	10,000
Community Network	10,000
Compassionate Friends	10,000
Contact	32,000
Contact a Family	90,000
Coronary Prevention Group	87,500
Cot Death Society	5,000
Council for Advancement of Communication with Deaf People	50,000
Crohns in Childhood Research Association	5,000
Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes	130,000
Cruse	114,000
Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust	20,000
Dark Horse Venture	5,000
Dial UK	45,000
Disability Alliance	25,000
Disabled Housing Trust	17,000
Disabled Living Centres Council	20,000
Disabled Living Foundation	337,000
Disabled Living Services Manchester	9,000
Disablement Income Group	37,000
Downs Syndrome Association	15,000
Dystonia Society	9,916
Dystrophic Epidermolysis Bullosa Research Association (DEBRA)	11,000
East London Asian Counselling	24,000
Eating Disorders Association	29,000
Elizabeth Fitzroy Homes	25,000
Endometriosis Society	10,000
Enuresis Resource and Information Centre	10,000
Exploring Parenthood	14,000
Extend	25,000
Family Heart Association	25,000
Family Planning Association	130,000
Family Policy Studies Centre	140,000
Family Rights Group	36,000
Family Service Units	240,000
Family Welfare Association	106,000
Foundation for Conductive Education	36,147
Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths	25,000
Foundation for Womens Health Research and Development (FORWARD)	20,000
Friends for the Young Deaf	10,000
Frontliners	50,000
Genetic Interest Group	12,000
Gingerbread	78,000

Organisation	£
Globe Centre	29,000
Good Practices in Mental Health	80,000
Guillain-Barre Syndrome Support Group	10,000
Haemophilia Society	20,000
Headway	40,000
Heartline Association	5,000
Herpes Association	15,000
Holiday Care Service	15,000
Home Farm Trust	20,000
Home Start Consultancy	100,000
Homes for Homeless People	48,000
Horticultural Therapy	58,100
Housing Campaign for Single Homeless (Char)	36,500
Hypogammaglobulinaemia Society	8,000
Impact Foundation	20,000
In Touch	3,000
Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence	119,500
Institute of Transcultural Health Care	22,000
International Social Service	50,000
Iris Fund	2,500
Joint Committee on Mobility for the Disabled	1,100
Jubilee Sailing Trust	20,000
Kids	20,000
Kids Clubs Network	90,000
Kings Fund Centre for Health Services Development	28,000
Leisure Link	15,000
Leonard Cheshire Foundation	75,000
London Chinese Health Resource Centre	30,000
L'Arche Ltd	12,000
Macfarlane Trust	155,000
Mainliners Ltd	40,000
Manic Depression Fellowship	7,500
Marfan Association	4,000
Marie Curie Memorial Foundation	20,000
Maternity Alliance	37,000
Menieres Society	7,500
Mental After Care Association	50,000
Mental Health Foundation	295,000
Mental Health Media Council	30,000
Migraine Trust	5,000
Miscarriage Association	15,000
Mobility Information Service	8,000
Motor Neurone Disease Association	20,000
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association	10,000
NAFSIYAT	15,000
National Association of Children with Congenital Abnormalities of Lower Limbs	5,000
National Association for Maternal and Child Welfare	15,000
National Association for Mental Health (MIND)	496,260
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO)	270,000
National Association for the Limbless Disabled	22,500
National Association for the Relief of Pagets Disease	5,000
National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital	90,000
National Association of Family Based Respite Care	15,000
National Association of Leagues of Hospital Friends	22,000
National Asthma Campaign	15,000
National Childbirth Trust	12,000
National Childminding Association	125,000
National Childrens Bureau	115,000
National Citizen Advocacy	15,000
National Community Health Resource	55,000
National Council for One Parent Families	150,000
National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)	125,000
National Counselling and Welfare Service for Sick Doctors	2,300
National Federation of Kidney Patients	12,500
National Information for Parents of Prematures (NIPPERS)	10,000
National Information Forum	16,000
National Institute for Social Work	155,000
National Joint Emergency Committee (Red Cross/St. John Ambulance)	25,000
National Meningitis Trust	15,000
National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents (NORCAP)	8,000
National Osteoporosis Society	20,000
National Playbus Association	54,000
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	138,000
National Self Help Support Centre	40,000
National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children	150,000
National Society of Non Smokers (QUIT)	42,500
National Stepfamily Association	20,000
National Toy Libraries Association	55,000
National Youth Agency	69,000
Neurofibromatosis Association (LINK)	5,000
New Horizons Trust	10,000
New Parent Infant Network (NEWPIN)	32,500
North Regional Association for the Blind	71,768
Northern Schizophrenia Fellowship	27,500
Outset	25,000
Overseas Doctors Association	17,000
Pain Relief Foundation	8,500
Parent to Parent Information on Adoption Service	6,500
Parentline Opus	40,000
Parents Against Injustice (PAIN)	35,000
Parents for Children	30,000
Parkinson Disease Society	22,000
Partially Sighted Society	10,000
Patients Association	20,000
Phobic Action	20,000
Phobics Society	7,500
Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied	30,000
Positively Women	40,000
Prader Willi Syndrome Association (UK)	5,000
Pre-School Playgroups Association	570,000
Prince of Wales Advisory Group on Disability	75,000
Queen Elizabeth Foundation for the Disabled	6,000
Rainer Foundation	26,700
Rape Counselling and Research Project	20,000
Research Trust for Metabolic Diseases	5,000
Restricted Growth Association	7,000
Richmond Fellowship	97,000
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)	225,000
Royal National Institute for the Deaf	100,810
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)	15,000
Samaritans	155,000
Save the Children Fund	30,000
Schizophrenia A National Emergency (SANE)	50,000
Scoliosis Association United Kingdom	2,000
Sense (NADBRH)	30,000
Sequal	25,000
Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with a Disability	36,000
Sickle Cell Society	35,000
Skills for People	11,000
Society for Mucopolysaccharide Diseases	5,000
South Regional Association for the Blind	132,084
Standing Committee on Sexual Abuse of Children (SCOSAC)	20,000
Standing Conference Ethnic Minority Senior Citizen (SCEMSC)	15,000
Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Association	8,000
Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society	27,000
Support After Termination for Abnormality (STFA)	10,000
Tay Sachs and Allied Diseases Association	4,000
Tibble Trust	1,500
Toxoplasmosis Trust	10,000
Tracheo Oesophageal Fistula Support (TOFS)	2,500
Tripscope	4,000

Organisation	£
Tuberous Sclerosis Association	2,000
Turning Point	110,000
Twins and Multiple Births Association	10,000
United Kingdom Thalassaemia Society	28,000
United Response	20,000
Values into Action	20,000
Vision Aid	15,000
Vocal	15,000
Voice for the Child in Care	7,500
Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children	60,000
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Committee for Under Fives (VOLCUF)	36,000
Walsingham Community Homes	10,000
Wessex Rehabilitation Association	5,000
Westminster Pastoral Foundation	50,000
Widows Advisory Trust	18,000
Winged Fellowship Trust	15,000
Womens Aid Federation	8,000
Womens Aid Federation (England)	136,650
Womens Health Concern	20,000
Womens National Cancer Control Campaign	30,000
Womens Therapy Centre	15,000
Working Mothers Association	35,000
Young Minds	10,000

Residential Care Homes

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of beds provided in residential care for elderly people in *(a)* local authority residential care homes, *(b)* private residential care homes and *(c)* independent nursing homes, by district health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of nursing home beds by each district health authority is contained in "Private Hospitals Homes and Clinics Registered under Section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984". The number of residential care places for elderly and younger physically handicapped people by local authority is contained in "RA/89/2 Residential Accommodation for Elderly and for Young Physically Handicapped People: All Residents in Local Authority, Voluntary and Private Homes Year ending 31 March 1989 England". Copies of both these publications are in the Library.

Mental Handicap

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department makes each year of the likely changes in numbers by region of children needing health services who are born mentally handicapped; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Responsibility for assessing the likely health service needs of the local population including children with learning disabilities (mental handicap) rests with individual district health authorities. The Department is, however, currently funding a research project led by Professor Alberman of the London hospital medical school to predict the incidence and prevalence of severe learning disability. It is hoped that this will lead to guidance which will assist authorities in the planning of local health, social and educational services over the next 30 years.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what weight is given in determining levels of funding to health authorities to the numbers of people moving into and out of an area in each year who are mentally handicapped adults and children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Regional health authority allocations are calculated by means of a weighted capitation formula which takes as its starting point the region's projected resident population for the year of allocation. The latest available figures, provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, are used in the formula. The projections data are based on the 1981 census and represent OPCS's estimate of population changes since then, together with assumptions for future mortality, fertility and migration. No specific allowance is made for the number of mentally handicapped people moving into and out of an area in each year.

Abortion

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many legal abortions have taken place in each of the 17 health districts in Yorkshire in each year from 1980 onwards; and on what grounds these abortions were granted.

Mr. Dorrell: Full information is available only at disproportionate cost. Readily available data for residents of the districts are given in the tables.

Legal abortions
Area of usual residence
1980-82
Health districts in Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Area of usual residence	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*
Yorkshire	7,574	7,472	7,600
Hull	607	552	606
Beverley	283	312	394
Grimsby	276	297	329
Scunthorpe	401	376	350
Northallerton	164	177	201
York	472	432	502
Scarborough	304	315	295
Harrogate	228	259	213
Bradford	730	736	707
Airedale	341	328	295
Calderdale	383	361	383
Huddersfield	466	464	452
Dewsbury	336	300	330
Western (Leeds)	961	881	937
Eastern (Leeds)	920	974	897
Western (Wakefield)	361	325	342
Eastern (Pontefract)	341	383	367

Legal abortions
Area of usual residence
1983-86
District health authorities in Yorkshire regional health authority

Area of usual residence	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Yorkshire	7,461	7,834	8,087	8,517
Hull	659	728	763	833
East Yorkshire	224	289	314	337
Grimsby	335	309	416	432
Scunthorpe	388	352	396	383
Northallerton	200	214	201	202
York	484	487	496	560
Scarborough	273	258	310	291
Harrogate	214	236	227	285
Bradford	723	816	857	859

Area of usual residence	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Airedale	324	334	333	244
Calderdale	373	436	450	458
Huddersfield	528	545	553	590
Dewsbury	345	372	388	388
Leeds Western	909	1,009	920	1,027
Leeds Eastern	803	804	776	852
Wakefield	333	306	332	368
Pontefract	346	339	355	408

Legal abortions
Area of usual residence
1987-90
District health authorities in Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Area of usual residence	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Yorkshire	9,128	9,567	9,944	[1]10,221
Hull	859	939	1,001	[1]1,054
East Yorkshire	394	422	427	[1]419
Grimsby	510	495	560	[1]541
Scunthorpe	397	466	496	[1]472
Northallerton	210	248	226	[1]210
York	581	626	636	[1]733
Scarborough	332	326	344	[1]313
Harrogate	215	155	338	[1]360
Bradford	902	937	933	[1]918
Airedale	312	376	339	[1]356
Calderdale	481	558	594	[1]504
Huddersfield	598	666	676	[1]669
Dewsbury	400	461	461	[1]483
Leeds Western	1,101	1,120	1,118	[1]1,209
Leeds Eastern	946	960	963	[1]1,053
Wakefield	432	393	373	[1]432
Pontefract	458	419	459	[1]495

[1] Provisional.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Dorrell: Proposed publicity campaigns for 1991-92 costing more than £100,000 are as follows:

Help with NHS Treatment Costs.
Health Advice for Travellers.
Organ Donation.
Blood Donor Recruitment.
Keep Warm Keep Well.
Information for Disabled People, advisors and carers.
Children's Act.
Community Care.
AIDS.
Drug misuse.
Women's Health.
Nursing.
NHS Careers.
'The Health of the Nation' Green Paper.

Other campaigns may be included during the year.

Decisions have yet to be taken on the use of television advertising.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had been waiting for more than a year for an operation in East Birmingham district on *(a)* 31 December 1989, and *(b)* 31 March 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[pursuant to the reply, 20 June, column 302]:* I regret that there was an error in my previous reply. The number of people waiting for over a year for in-patient operations in East Birmingham district at 30 September 1990 should read 247.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Review

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the distribution of his consultation document on the future of local government.

Mr. Key: Copies of the consultation paper "The Structure of Local Government in England" were sent to all principal local authorities, local authority associations, Members of Parliament and major national organisations with an interest in local government and to other organisations and individuals on request.

Waste Management

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide up-to-date waste management guidance on the implementation of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Trippier: My Department is actively engaged in revising and developing its waste management papers series. This was stated in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance".

Publication of these papers started in 1976 to provide authoritative technical guidance and codes of practice on waste handling and disposal methods. They are recognised by waste management practitioners and regulators as standards of good practice and are respected throughout the industry. We intend to build on this foundation to provide comprehensive backing for the high and consistent standards of waste management to be introduced under the Environmental Protection Act. Following public consultation, we have today published a new waste management paper (No.28) on the recycling of waste.

Our proposed programme for further work on waste management papers is as follows:

WMP	*Subject*	*Consultation*	*Issue of final document*
28	Recycling	out	July 1991
27	Landfill gas	July 1991	October 1991
1	Evaluation of Options	October 1991	January 1992
3	Waste Disposal Plans	February 1992	June 1992
4	Waste Licensing	May 1992	December 1992
25	Clinical Waste	August 1992	December 1992
26(A)	Landfill Completion	June 1992	December 1992
23	Special Waste	July 1992	January 1993
6	PCBs	September 1992	March 1993

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what weight is given in determining grant levels to local authorities each year to the numbers of people moving into a council area for *(a)* all people, *(b)* school age children, *(c)* mentally handicapped adults and *(d)* mentally handicapped children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The amount of revenue support grant received by each authority depends on its standard spending assessment—the Government's view of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure for each local authority. The SSAs are based on a number of indicators including resident population, population aged under 18 years and school pupils and students. Full details are given in the "Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England)" which is in the Library. No separate account is taken of the numbers of people who move between authorities each year, but the information used is the most up to date available on a consistent basis for all authorities.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what formula he accounts for revenue funding in each year for local authorities who have rising numbers of children and adults suffering mental handicap; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Revenue funding in respect of social services provided by local authorities for children and adults suffering mental handicap is based on the children's social services and the other social services standard spending assessments. Details of these formulae are given in he "Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England)" which is in the Library.

3Ds Ltd.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *394*, on 3Ds Ltd., if he will list the shareholders referred to; and what examination he proposes to make of the suitability of 3Ds Ltd. as a recipient of a city grant.

Mr. Key: The shareholders of 3Ds Ltd. are Brian Peace, Paul Malkin and Old Court Ltd. If a full appraisal of the proposed development is undertaken, the Department will need to satisfy itself that 3Ds Ltd. has the experience, expertise and capacity to carry out and complete the project.

Industrial Discharges

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the average levels of polychlorinated biphenyl in industrial discharges in the Rossendale and Darwen constituency; what is the highest level of measured discharge of polychlorinated biphenyl; and what is the maximum permitted discharge level.

Mr. Trippier: There are no consented discharges to water of polychlorinated biphenyls in the Rossendale and Darwen constituency.

Civil and Marine Ltd.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the environmental impact of the proposed gravel extraction from the Thames estuary by Civil and Marine Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The decision to grant a licence for the extraction of marine sand and gravel rests with the Crown estate after consultation with those whose interests may be affected by the proposed dredging. My Department is responsible for co-ordinating these consultations and formulating the Government view. I understand that the Crown estate is at present considering the proposal made by Civil and Marine Ltd. and will take full account of all the environmental issues before any request for a Government view may be made.

Urban Programme

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table showing, separately for each year of the last five financial years, the allocation of resources to each urban programme authority and the level of spending achieved by each authority.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* The total amounts of *(a)* urban programme expenditure allocated to local authorities in England and *(b)* expenditure outturn achieved by those authorities, for each year from 1986-87 to 1990-91, were as follows:

	(a) Total allocation £ million	*(b) Total outturn £ million*
1986-87	228·84	220·42
1987-88	260·10	234·59
1988-89	245·69	226·58
1989-90	237·40	229·57
[1]1990-91	245·52	227·79

[1] The figures for 1990-91 are necessarily provisional at this stage.

These figures do not include top slices for special initiatives or district health authority allocations and outturns.

I enclose tables showing details for all the authorities. Copies of these tables will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Pentachlorophenol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he possesses concerning the current rates of discharge of the pesticide pentachlorophenol to the environment; and what are the primary sources of these discharges.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* Results of monitoring for pentachlorophenol are compiled by the National Rivers Authority and returned annually by my Department to the European Commission. These results are also held on the National Rivers Authority's public registers. Discharges containing pentachlorophenol occur mainly in the north-west and Yorkshire National Rivers Authority regions where pentachlorophenol has been applied as a rot-proofing agent in cloth used by textile finishing companies.

Aggregates

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to publicise (i) the availability of the document "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales: Review of MPG6" and (ii) the fact that his Department will take into account the views of interested parties on this document when revising mineral plan guidance note 6.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 17 June 1991]:* Following the reply which I gave on 7 May, *Official Report*, column *401*, about this report my Department issued a press release to announce its publication. This has received extensive media coverage. The report has also been made available to a number of interested organisations and individuals. We have made it clear in both the press release and report that we welcome the views of all interested parties on the forecasts. These will be taken into account in the preparation of the revised draft guidelines.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will show for each local authority *(a)* the gain or loss in area protection grant in million pounds and pounds per adult comparing 1990-91 with 1991-92 and *(b)* political control, for the current financial year.

Mr. Portillo: Area protection grant was not paid before 1991-92. However, it subsumes the safety net and the low rateable value areas grant which operated in 1990-91 and is payable to some of those areas which received help from both those sources, or through the safety net alone, in that year. The amount of area protection grant paid to any area is equal to the amount which it received in 1990-91 from these two sources less £25 per charge payer. Details are as follows:

1991-92 area protection grant and 1990-91 equivalent by authority with political control

Local authority and political control	*1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million*	*1991-92 area protection grant £ million*	*1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult*	*1991-92 area protection grant £ adult*
Greater London				
Greenwich (Labour)	32·955	29·423	212	187
Hammersmith and Fulham (Labour)	13·148	10·307	111	86
Lambeth (Labour)	4·723	0·410	27	2
Lewisham (Labour)	25·091	20·325	147	122
Southwark (Labour)	26·352	22·289	160	135
Tower Hamlets (Social-Liberal Democrat)	18·966	17·171	168	143
Wandsworth (Conservative)	24·031	18·084	116	91
Barking and Dagenham (Labour)	11·678	9·015	107	82
Bexley (Conservative)	1·197	—	7	—
Havering (no overall control)	0·934	—	5	—
Hillingdon (Conservative)	7·361	2·994	42	17

1991-92 area protection grant and 1990-91 equivalent by authority with political control

Local authority and political control	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million	1991-92 area protection grant £ million	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult	1991-92 area protection grant £ adult
Greater Manchester				
Bury (Labour)	0·829	—	6	—
Oldham (Labour)	2·582	—	16	—
Rochdale (Labour)	11·438	7·063	72	47
Tameside (Labour)	9·269	4·735	54	29
Wigan (Labour)	15·949	10·069	69	44
Merseyside				
St. Helens (Labour)	2·931	—	22	—
South Yorkshire				
Barnsley (Labour)	25·120	21·008	150	125
Doncaster (Labour)	22·956	17·501	105	80
Rotherham (Labour)	22·704	16·816	113	88
Sheffield (Labour)	44·876	32·202	107	82
Tyne and Wear				
Gateshead (Labour)	13·439	9·489	86	61
Newcastle upon Tyne (Labour)	4·165	—	21	—
North Tyneside (Labour)	6·202	2·365	41	16
South Tyneside (Labour)	8·608	5·638	72	47
Sunderland (Labour)	14·002	8·755	65	40
West Yorkshire				
Bradford (Labour)	17·861	9·772	55	30
Calderdale (Labour)	23·342	19·751	163	138
Kirklees (Labour)	36·851	29·886	132	107
Leeds (Labour)	7·356	—	14	—
Wakefield (Labour)	26·617	20·216	111	86

1991-92 area protection grant and 1990-91 equivalent by authority with political control

Local authority and political control	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million	1991-92 area protection grant £ million	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult	1991-92 area protection grant £ adult
Avon				
Bristol (Labour)	6·644	—	23	—
Cleveland				
Hartlepool (Labour)	3·824	2·183	57	32
Langbaurgh-on-Tees (Labour)	3·560	0·778	32	7
Middlesbrough (Labour)	4·077	1·502	40	15
Cornwall				
Kerrier (no overall control)	0·745	—	11	—
Penwith (no overall control)	0·145	—	3	—
Cumbria				
Allerdale (Labour)	8·185	5·894	106	81
Barrow-in-Furness (no overall control)	7·814	6·323	136	111
Carlisle (Labour)	3·472	1·491	44	19
Copeland (Labour)	6·350	4·924	116	91
Eden (Independent)	2·353	1·483	67	42
South Lakeland (no overall control)	1·935	—	24	—
Derbyshire				
Amber Valley (Labour)	5·052	2·850	58	33
Bolsover (Labour)	7·244	5·836	133	108
Chesterfield (Labour)	5·392	3·409	70	45
Derbyshire Dales (Conservative)	0·775	—	14	—
Erewash (Labour)	4·312	2·179	51	26
High Peak (no overall control)	3·823	2·263	60	35
North East Derbyshire (Labour)	4·665	2·781	62	37
South Derbyshire (Labour)	0·865	—	16	—
Devon				
Mid Devon (Independent)	0·739	—	16	—
North Devon (Social-Liberal Democrat)	1·364	—	22	—
Torbay (Social-Liberal Democrat)	1·224	—	13	—
Torridge (Independent)	2·559	1·562	65	40

Local authority and political control	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million	1991-92 area protection grant £ million	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult	1991-92 area protection grant £ adult
West Devon (Independent)	0·052	—	2	—
Dorset				
Weymouth and Portland (no overall control)	0·012	—	0	—

1991-92 area protection grant and 1990-91 equivalent by authority with political control

Local authority and political control	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million	1991-92 area protection grant £ million	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult	1991-92 area protection grant £ adult
Durham				
Chester-le-Street (Labour)	1·793	0·725	43	18
Darlington (Labour)	1·827	—	24	—
Derwentside (Labour)	7·451	5·720	112	87
Durham (Labour)	2·004	0·460	32	7
Easington (Labour)	8·594	6·574	114	89
Sedgefield (Labour)	7·957	6·245	117	92
Teesdale (Independent)	1·242	0·738	65	40
Wear Valley (Social-Liberal Democrat)	6·112	4·837	125	100
Gloucestershire				
Forest of Dean (Labour)	0·044	—	1	—
Humberside				
Boothferry (Conservative)	4·318	3·021	87	62
Cleethorpes (no overall control)	2·388	1·127	46	21
East Yorkshire (no overall control)	5·127	3·391	78	53
Glanford (no overall control)	1·274	—	23	—
Great Grimsby (Labour)	3·033	1·374	46	21
Holderness (Independent)	1·341	0·315	33	8
Kingston upon Hull (Labour)	18·861	14·384	99	74
Scunthorpe (Labour)	2·954	1·860	65	40
Kent				
Dartford (Conservative)	0·553	—	9	—
Lancashire				
Blackburn (Labour)	4·895	2·618	52	27
Blackpool (Labour)	4·079	1·118	35	10
Burnley (Labour)	6·895	5·074	101	76
Hyndburn (Labour)	5·190	3·701	89	64
Lancaster (no overall control)	1·594	—	17	—
Pendle (Labour)	6·655	5·097	106	81
Ribble Valley (Conservative)	0·505	—	13	—
Rossendale (Labour)	4·430	3·188	91	66
South Ribble (Conservative)	1·057	—	14	—
Leicestershire				
Leicester (Labour)	4·871	—	24	—
Lincolnshire				
Lincoln (Labour)	0·621	—	10	—

1991-92 area protection grant and 1990-91 equivalent by authority with political overall control)

Local authority and political overall control)	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million	1991-92 area protection grant £ million	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult	1991-92 area protection grant £ adult
Norfolk				
Great Yarmouth (Labour)	0·598	—	9	—
Northumberland				
Alnwick (Social-Liberal Democrats)	1·099	0·533	48	23
Berwick-upon-Tweed (no overall control)	1·421	0·911	70	45
Blyth Valley (Labour)	3·952	2·494	67	42
Tynedale (no overall control)	0·952	—	22	—
Wansbeck (Labour)	5·919	4·752	127	102

Local authority and political overall control)	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ million	1991-92 area protection grant £ million	1990-91 safety net receipt and low RV grant £ adult	1991-92 area protection grant £ adult
North Yorkshire				
Craven (no overall control)	2·007	0·970	50	25
Hambleton (no overall control)	0·328	—	6	—
Richmondshire (Independent)	0·565	—	16	—
Ryedale (no overall control)	2·079	0·328	30	5
Scarborough (no overall control)	4·663	2·658	57	32
Selby (no overall control)	2·109	0·437	32	7
York (Labour)	5·432	3·486	69	44
Nottinghamshire				
Ashfield (Labour)	4·888	2·837	59	34
Bassetlaw (Labour)	1·527	—	19	—
Mansfield (Labour)	3·754	1·737	48	23
Shropshire				
Oswestry (Independent)	0·608	—	24	—
Staffordshire				
Newcastle-under-Lyme (Labour)	1·032	—	11	—
Staffordshire Moorlands (Independent)	0·535	—	7	—
Stoke-on-Trent (Labour)	6·327	1·515	33	8
Warwickshire				
Nuneaton and Bedworth (Labour)	0·152	—	2	—
Wiltshire				
Thamesdown (Labour)	0·232	—	2	—

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the percentage change in income during the period 1979 to 1987 *(a)* before and *(b)* after housing costs, of each percentage group from the households below average incomes data, published in July 1990.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is in the table:

Real Percentage Rise in Each Decile's Median Income 1979-1987

Decile	Before Housing Costs	After Housing Costs
1	8·5	0·1
2	6·8	2·4
3	8·6	2·8
4	10·6	7·9
5	13·1	11·9
6	16·0	15·4
7	16·7	17·5
8	19·3	21·4
9	25·7	25·0
10	38·8	40·3

The income measures used are the same in all respects to those published in Tables A and D of Annex 1 to HBAI 1981-1987.

War Pensions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many cases were helped by local war pensions committees over the last five years; and at what cost;

(2) whether he has any plans to increase resources available to local war pensions committees.

Miss Widdecombe: The numbers of cases relating to war pensions and allowances which were heard by local war pensions committees over the last five years is as follows:

1986 — 289
1987 — 240
1988 — 356
1989 — 251
1990 — 247

In addition, members of the committees and their associated voluntary workers undertook a number of welfare visits to war pensioners in their own homes.

Information on the cost of war pensions committees is not available. Expenditure on the committees is met from the overall budget for the war pensioners welfare service and is not recorded separately. We have no current plans to increase the resources available to war pensions committees.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the current budget available to the section of his Department which administers the war pensioners' welfare service; and what increases are planned for the next two years;

(2) whether he has any plans to extend the scope and expand the services provided by the war pensioners' welfare service.

Miss Widdecombe: The budget available for the administration of the war pensioners' welfare service for 1991-92 is £3·7 million. Budgets for the following two years have not yet been decided.

The war pensioners' welfare service is available to all war disablement pensioners and war widows, and its services are kept under regular review. The war pensions directorate, which is responsible for delivering those services, is currently in the process of consulting ex-service

organisations about them. We shall review the services provided by the welfare service in the light of those consultations.

Adjudication Regulations

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review or amend regulation 72 of the Social Security Benefit (Adjudication) Regulations 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We recently referred a proposed draft amendment to regulation 72 to the Social Security Advisory Committee. The committee has reported its findings, which we are currently considering.

Asbestos

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the lowest level of war disablement pension paid to those suffering from asbestosis;

(2) how many war disablement pensions have been and are being paid because of asbestosis arising from exposure to asbestos dust while in the forces; and how many of the asbestosis pensioners have died.

Miss Widdecombe: War disablement pensions are awarded where the degree of disablement due to service in the armed forces ranges from 20 to 100 per cent.; if less than 20 per cent. a gratuity may be awarded. These provisions apply to all disabilities.

Information regarding war pensions awarded as a result of exposure to asbestos is not available.

Benefits

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what forecast of the percentage take-up of widows' benefits has been used when estimating expenditure on these benefits for 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: The planned level of expenditure on widows' benefits shown in table 1 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94, Social Security" (Cm. 1514), was based on the figures available in the autumn of 1990 on the number of recipients, the composition of their families and the level of awards, and on the trends in those figures and the effects of uprating. It was not based on any explicit view of future take-up, but, implicitly, on the established trend.

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what forecast of the percentage take-up of disability working allowance has been used when estimating expenditure on this benefit in 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: Disability working allowance will not be introduced until April 1992.

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what forecast of the percentage take-up of invalid care allowance has been used when estimating expenditure on this benefit in 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: The planned level of expenditure on invalid care allowance shown in table 1 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94, Social Security" (Cm. 1514), was based on the figures available in the autumn of 1990 on the number of recipients, the circumstances in which they are caring, the level of awards and changes in other benefits which affect entitlement, and on the trends in those figures and the effects of uprating. It was not based on any explicit view of future take-up, but, implicitly, on the established trend.

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what forecast of the percentage take-up of family income supplement has been used when estimating expenditure on this benefit in 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: Family income supplement was replaced by family credit in April 1988. The planned level of expenditure on family credit shown in table 1 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94, Social Security" (Cm. 1514), was based on the figures available in the autumn of 1990 on the number of recipients, the composition of their families and the level of awards, and on the trends in those figures and the effects of uprating. It was not based on any explicit view of future take-up, but, implicitly, on the established trend.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he intends to take following the ruling of the European Court of Justice on Roger Newton's entitlement to mobility allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Newton's case will be referred back to the social security commissioner for determination in the light of the European Court's judgment. We are considering what other steps need to be taken to give effect to the court's judgment.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people living in other European Community countries who will be entitled to reinstatement of mobility allowance following the decision of the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We are considering the full implications of this judgment. We estimate that fewer than 100 people each year lose their mobility allowance when they move to live in another EC member state.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the case of Roger Newton applies to benefits other than mobility allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We are studying the full text of the judgment to consider its wider implications for non-contributory disability benefits.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department currently has no firm plans for television advertising. A publicity campaign connected with the Disability Living Allowance and

Disability Working Allowance Act is likely to involve expenditure in excess of £100,000 but firm media plans have not yet been concluded. We have not given approval for any other publicity campaigns with this level of expenditure.

Disabled People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received concerning the Disabled Persons (Services, Representation and Consultation) Act 1986 since March 1991; and how many have objected to the non-implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 and the delaying of section 7.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

Between 1 March 1991 and 26 June 1991 we received 212 letters concerning our decision not to implement sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons Act, two of which also referred to section 7. One letter was also received on the matter of section 7 only. The Act was also the subject of seven parliamentary questions during this period.

Young People (Benefits)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of increasing the personal allowance for young people under the age of 25 years who are in receipt of *(a)* community charge benefit and *(b)* housing benefit to £39·65 for 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* The latest estimates suggest that these measures would cost *(a)* £25 million, and *(b)* £25 million in Great Britain in 1991-92.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1986-87-88 Family Expenditure Surveys.

SCOTLAND

Pensions

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the date of the announcement that public service pensioners had been underpaid due to an error in calculating the retail prices index; what was the amount of money due to national health service pensioners on that date in Scotland; what was the amount of money paid by his Department into the national health service pensioners trust and the date on which it was paid; and by how much that amount was adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to his questions given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 28 June.

William Wallace Heritage Centre

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what requests he has received for funding of a William Wallace heritage centre at Elderslie; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am not aware of having received any request for funding for a William Wallace heritage centre at Elderslie. I would be willing to consider such a request.

Judicial Appointments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning the creation of a judicial appointments committee in relation to the selection and appointment of judges and sheriffs; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. The present arrangements are kept under review to ensure that in respect of each vacancy the best-fitted candidate is appointed.

Police (Civil Damages)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the total amount of money paid out by police authorities for civil damages since 1980.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally and cannot quickly be obtained.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employment training trainees *(a)* acquired full-time employment, *(b)* gained vocational qualifications, *(c)* failed to complete the training plan and *(d)* entered self-employment, expressed as a percentage since ET's inception.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is given in the table. Information is not available for the periods prior to July 1989 and is not yet available beyond December 1990. Many of those not completing their agreed training leave to enter jobs, self-employment or full-time education.

Employment Training
Trainee outcomes: July1989—December 1990

	Percentage of all leavers
In full-time employment 3 months after leaving	24
In self-employment 3 months after leaving	5
Obtained a qualification or credit towards one	24
Did not complete training agreed with training provider	54

Source: ET national follow-up survey.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the report of his Department's survey of trainees on employment training was completed; and when it was made available to hon. Members.

Mr. Jackson: The survey of trainees on Employment Training is not yet complete.

TUC (Training)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of departmental funding of the Trades Union Congress for educational purposes; what criteria determines the continuity of that funding; which section of his Department is responsible for vetting materials used on TUC training or education courses which use departmental funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has offered the TUC a trade union education and training grant of £1·734 million for 1991-92. The continuity of such funding is dependent on a satisfactory annual review of expenditure of the grant and on the overriding need to control public expenditure. Monitoring the expenditure of the grant to ensure that it satisfies the terms and conditions of the relevant memorandum of arrangements is carried out jointly by officials of the Department of Employment and the TUC with the assistance of Her Majesty's inspectorate.

Skill Centres

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps have been taken to monitor the use by the TICC (Lakin Consortium) of the £2·1 million transfer fee paid to it as part of the sale of four skill centres; and how much has been spent on the acquisition of non-training companies.

Mr. Jackson: Under the terms of the sale of the skills training agency there is no continued business relationship between my Department and any of the purchasers. TICC Ltd. is a private company and my Department has no responsibility for its business activities.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list any changes in *(a)* the numbers of staff, *(b)* the volume of training and *(c)* staff terms and conditions resulting from the transfer of four skill centres to TICC (Lakin Consortium).

Mr. Jackson: The four skill centres purchased by TICC Ltd. are now in the private sector and issues relating to staff numbers, volumes of training and changes of staff terms and conditions are matters for the company and its staff.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what monitoring he is undertaking of any proposals by TICC (Lakin Consortium) relating to *(a)* closure of any of the four skill centres, *(b)* the purchase of non-training companies, *(c)* reductions in staffing levels and *(d)* the honouring of contracts agreed with the civil service before the transfer of the four centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: TICC Ltd. is a private company and the four skill centres purchased by TICC Ltd. are now in the private sector. Any issues relating to the future business plans of TICC Ltd. or its staff numbers, are matters for the company and its staff.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list any conditions attached to the payment of £2·1 million to TICC Ltd. as part of the transfer of Ipswich, Cumbria, East Lancashire and St. Helens skill centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The payment of £2·1 million to TICC Ltd. was the negative consideration agreed after negotiation between my Department and the company and reflects the overall value that could be attached to the business at the time. No conditions were attached by either party to the sale.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether TICC (Lakin Consortium) was included in the submissions excluded from being allowed to tender for the skill centres; and on what grounds such decisions were made.

Mr. Jackson: At no point in the sale process were TICC Ltd. excluded from the tendering process. Bids were excluded only if they failed to meet the Government's six sale objectives, and TICC Ltd. met these at all stages of the sale.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps were taken to assess *(a)* the competence of the TICC (Lakin Consortium) to manage the four skill centres transferred to it and *(b)* the previous record of TICC in providing training.

Mr. Jackson: The Lakin Consortium (now TICC Ltd.) was formed with the intention of placing a bid for part of the skills training agency network. Thorough checks were undertaken by my Department's sale advisers into the background of the consortium members, the financial viability of the new company and its future plans for the training business. These were satisfactory and the bid placed by TICC Ltd. fully met the Government's six sale objectives.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the financial and training record changes which occurred between the initial submissions from TICC (Lakin Consortium) being rejected and his subsequently agreeing to the transfer of four skill centres to this consortium.

Mr. Jackson: TICC's original bid included a number of skill centres for which other bids were put forward. In the context of all the bids put forward, these provided a better match with the Government's sale objectives, so TICC's bid was rejected. The company subsequently submitted a bid for four of the skill centres which remained unsold at the end of the original sale period.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out the staff terms and conditions agreed by the Government at the time of transfer of four skill centres to the TICC; and what steps he is taking to ensure compliance by TICC with the contract terms agreed.

Mr. Jackson: The general terms and conditions of former civil servants who transferred to the private sector were protected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 so that on privatisation previous conditions still applied. Special arrangements were made to secure the transfer of pension rights which are outside the scope of the regulations. The terms and conditions of TICC's employees are now a matter between them and the company.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list any conditions attached to the payment of £800,000 to Training Businesses Ltd. as part of the transfer of Lambeth's skill centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The payment of £800,000 to the Training Business Ltd. was the negative consideration agreed after negotiations between my Department and the company and reflects the overall value that could be attached to the business at the time. No conditions were attached by either party to the sale.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assurances were given to the skill centres about future levels of employment training funding prior to their transfer being concluded.

Mr. Jackson: No guarantees of Employment Training income have been given to any purchaser of skill centres for the current or subsequent years.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was *(a)* the number of staff dealing with unemployment benefit claims in each of the standard regions, *(b)* the number of unemployed people claiming benefit in each of the standard regions and *(c)* the staff-to-claimant ratio in each of the standard regions, as at 1 March 1990 and 1 May 1991.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Detached Duty Workers

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of detached duty workers recruited and the numbers now operating in the south-east, south-west, London, East Anglia and east midlands dealing with unemployed people claiming benefit; what were the standard regions from which the detached workers were recruited; and what are *(a)* the total and *(b)* the additional costs of employing them including travel, overnight allowances, salaries and any other premium payments, for each month between 7 December 1990 to 31 May 1991.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Electricity Contracting Industry

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the official letter to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), dated 10 June, sent by the director of the Electrical Contractors Association, detailing the response by training enterprise councils to future apprentice training in the electrical contracting industry; and what action he intends to take regarding the problems described in that letter.

Mr. Jackson: All 82 training enterprise councils in England and Wales have offered a youth training (YT) contract to Job Training Ltd. (JTL) which is the managing agency set up by the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) in conjunction with the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union. JTL has signed, or is in the process of signing contracts with 80 of the TECs. The company has decided not to contract for places in the Dorset and Somerset TEC areas.

I replied on 28 June to the letter dated 10 June from the director of the Electrical Contractors Association. All problems described in that letter have been addressed.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Jackson: Publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 planned at this stage by the Department during the remainder of this financial year are press advertising for career development loans in the summer, and in support of the national training awards winners announcement in November.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dioxins

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research funded or commissioned by his Department in the past 10 years regarding dioxins in foodstuffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: A list of the research in question is given in the table. The aim of this work has been to develop reliable analytical methods for the measurement of low levels of dioxins in food. The best of the procedures that have been identified so far have recently been used to survey the levels of dioxins entering the food chain in urban and rural food production areas. Some preliminary results from this work were described in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on 26 June, *Official Report*, col. *500*.

Duration	*Title*	*Location*
1 January 1986 to 31 May 1988	Development of analytical methods for the analysis of dioxins in biological materials	University of East Anglia
1 October 1987 to 30 September 1988	Production of affinity columns for dioxin analysis	University of East Anglia
1 January 1988 to 30 June 1989	Production and characterisation of antibodies against dioxins use in their analysis	AFRC Institute of Food Research Norwich
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	Evaluation of affinity columns for dioxin analysis	MAFF Food Science Laboratory
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	Participation in WHO inter-laboratory study on methods for dioxin analysis in human milk and blood	MAFF Food Science Laboratory
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	Development of methods of dioxin analysis in support of EC BCR certification of reference materials	MAFF Food Science Laboratory

Duration	Title	Location
1 March 1991 to 1 September 1991	Development of immunoaffinity columns for dioxin analysis	Biocode Ltd.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's policy in respect of testing milk for dioxins.

Mr. Maclean: Milk is a good medium for checking on the presence of airborne contaminants in the food chain and is, therefore, being used to build up a picture of dioxin levels in various rural and urban food production areas. Some preliminary results from this work were described in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire West, (Mr. Hind) on 26 June, *Official Report*, column *500*.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the farms which supplied milk within 0·1 picogramme of his Department's safety level for dioxins.

Mr. Maclean: Some preliminary results from a study of dioxin levels in milk from urban and rural areas were described in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire West, (Mr. Hind) on 26 June, *Official Report*, column *500*. It is not the normal practice, however, to name businesses from which samples have been taken for surveillance purposes.

Blue-ear Disease

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the man hours spent in *(a)* the field and *(b)* the laboratory each month since 1 March on blue-ear disease in pigs at the Lincoln veterinary investigation centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The man hours spent in *(a)* the field and *(b)* the laboratory on blue-eared pig disease by staff at the Lincoln veterinary investigation centre since 1 March are:

Month	*(a) In the field*	*(b) In the laboratory*
March	0	5
April	0	10
May	207	132
June[1]	219	144

[1]to 21 June 1991.

Sheep Dips

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received *(a)* from the National Farmers Union, *(b)* from hon. Members and *(c)* from individual farmers on the health and environmental consequences of the use of organo-phosphorus sheep dips; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members, individual farmers and others on the health and environmental consequences of the use of organo-phosphorous sheep dips. I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on 20 June (*Official Report*, column *449*).

Pigs

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *383*, whether he intends to impose restrictions on the holdings in the counties listed that had received pigs from infected holdings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Restrictions have already been placed on holdings which have received pigs from premises with suspected or confirmed cases of blue-eared pig disease within a 56-day period prior to the day that suspicion of disease was reported.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of restrictions imposed on premises with suspected or confirmed cases of blue-ear disease in the past 72 hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Two suspect cases were reported and three cases confirmed within the 72 hours prior to midday on 28 June 1991. The suspect cases involve premises already under restriction, having received pigs from infected premises. One of the suspect cases is in the parish of Paull (Humberside), within the restricted zone; the other is in the parish of Saxilby with Ingleby (Lincolnshire) and is very close to the Humberside restricted zone which has now been extended to include this case. The confirmed cases are in the parishes of Beeford (Humberside), Burneston (Humberside) and Shelton (Norfolk). There are at present a total of 14 confirmed and 10 suspected cases.

Veterinary Investigation Centres

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Ministry has yet received planning permission for the new veterinary investigation centres at Bury St. Edmunds and Warwickshire; at what stage his plans are for constructing the new centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Outline planning permission was granted by St. Edmundsbury borough council for a new veterinary investigation centre at Bury St. Edmunds on 18 February 1991. The plans for constructing the new centre are now at sketch plan stage. The building is on programme to be completed in mid-1993. For the new centre at Warwickshire a site has been identified on Ministry of Agriculture-owned land at Luddington and an outline planning application was submitted to Stratford-upon-Avon district council at the beginning of June, under the Department of the Environment circular 18/14. The plans for constructing this centre are also at sketch plan stage and the design is on programme for completion of the building in mid-1993.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the percentage of the total United Kingdom statutory salmonella work carried out at the veterinary investigation centre in Lincoln for each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: It is not possible to provide the information requested for the years prior to 1990. In the period 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991, 3·6 per cent. of the total statutory salmonella work in Great Britain was carried out in the Lincoln veterinary investigation centre.

Milk, Derbyshire

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will conduct a full investigation into the source of the dioxin contamination which is affecting milk in farms in Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am setting in hand a programme of further work in this area which is designed to throw light on the ways in which dioxins have come to be found in milk. This will include examinations of soil and grass. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will also be carrying out investigations. The results of the surveillance work will be published.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will name the farms in Derbyshire which have contamination of dioxin in milk above recommended levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Having received their agreement, I have passed the names and addresses of the two farmers concerned to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) but, as I have explained to him, they have indicated that they do not wish their names to be generally publicised.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Curry: MAFF has no plans to carry out television advertising campaigns. A touring exhibition is currently taking consumer information on a wide range of food safety and environmental issues to major shopping centres and agricultural shows; and plans are in hand to revise the Department's range of publications on food.

Thames Gravel

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the impact of the proposed extraction of gravel from the Thames estuary on *(a)* juvenile fish stocks, *(b)* cockles and *(c)* whiteweed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The proposal envisages the removal of a layer of silt material in order to extract aggregate from beneath it. In the Ministry's view this extraction process could create a plume of silt in the water column, which would be damaging to important commercial fisheries in the area.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the fishing industry on the proposed extraction of gravel from the Thames estuary by Civil and Marine Ltd.

Mr. Curry: I have received a number of representations objecting to the extraction of gravel from this area. I understand that in the light of consultations the company is not pursuing its application for a licence for experimental dredging.

DEFENCE

Army Act

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers he has under the Army Act to reconvene a board of inquiry with revised terms of reference.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Secretary of State for Defence has no direct powers under the Army Act 1955 to convene any board of inquiry. If it is necessary for a particular matter to be investigated by a board of inquiry, it will be convened by the relevant military authorities under the rules laid down in section 135 of the Army Act.

Training Exercises (Injuries)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for the last five years the number and type of injuries received by on-duty service personnel taking part in training exercises.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following table lists, by category, the total numbers by type of injuries received by all service personnel, including Gurkhas, on duty training exercises which required confinement to bed for a period of 48 hours or more, for each of the last five years.

Tri-service episodes of bedded sickness of 48 hours or more due to training injuries (including deaths)

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Aircraft accidents	38	35	31	40	38
Motor vehicle accidents	33	41	51	33	16
Other land transport accidents	0	1	0	1	0
Water transport accidents	2	2	1	4	0
Guns, explosives etc. accidents	24	22	18	17	7
Machinery, tools etc. accidents	184	170	167	113	82
Toxic and burning agents's accidents	21	17	20	26	24
Environmental factor accidents	137	202	172	105	83
Fall or jump etc. accidents	519	403	428	359	332
Other accidents	149	151	183	178	126
TOTAL	1,107	1,044	1,071	876	708

Note: Records of minor injuries which may have required medical attention are not held centrally and are only recorded in the individual personal medical files.

Asbestos

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in each of the last 10 years what has been the cost of removing asbestos;

(2) in how many Ministry of Defence establishments asbestos has been removed; and in how many establishments it is awaiting removal;

(3) how many claims for compensation there have been against the Ministry because of exposure to asbestos dust since 1961; how many *(a)* have been rejected, *(b)* are being negotiated and *(c)* have been successful; and, for those successful what compensation was paid.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Thurleigh Airfield

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has for the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Research Agency to use the airfield at Thurleigh for non-flying purposes;

(2) what will be the role of the Ministry of Defence towards development on the Thurleigh airfield during the transfer of facilities to Boscombe Down and Farnborough up to about 1993;

(3) how he proposes to reconcile a maximum return to Her Majesty's Government on the disposal of land and assets at Thurleigh with the need to safeguard existing residents against loss of amenity and environmental despoliation;

(4) what instructions he has given his consultants covering the next phase of consultations with local authorities and other interested parties over the use of the airfield at Thurleigh;

(5) whether he proposes to agree planning use of the airfield at Thurleigh with Bedfordshire county council prior to the conclusion of any sale to prospective purchasers of the land;

(6) if he will ensure that before any sale of the airfield at Thurleigh he will insist on an evironmental assessment being undertaken to cover the future use of the site;

(7) whether he is prepared to compensate local residents against loss of amenity due to excessive noise in the event of a substantial increase in aircraft use of the airfield at Thurleigh;

(8) if he will consider the disposal of the airfield at Thurleigh within a broad regional and national framework.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Following my announcement on 9 May concerning the collocation of research and experimental flying at Boscombe Down, detailed work has been set in hand to assess the options for disposal of the surplus airfields at Bedford and Farnborough.

A specialist consultancy firm has been retained to assist in this phase and it will be continuing its discussions with local planning authorities and other interested parties with a view to submitting recommendations on the planning and marketing strategies to be adopted for the effective disposal of the airfield sites.

As stated in my earlier announcement, our preliminary assessment is that Thurleigh airfield, Bedford could have potential as a commercial non-passenger airfield. It would be our intention to avoid a fragmented disposal of the site, if this were possible, and to offer it for sale in its entirety —save for a small MOD enclave which we envisage will be retained to house a simulator facility. Any proposals for other uses by either the MOD or the Defence Research Agency will need to be considered against the need to make the most cost-effective use of the defence estate, while at the same time maximising the return to the defence budget from the sale of surplus land.

In disposing of Thurleigh, it is our intention to agree a development brief with the local authorities concerned, prior to effecting the disposal of the site. This use of the planning machinery will ensure that any relevant regional and national factors are taken into account in so far as they relate to the disposal of the airfield. In addition, this will allow the maximum return to the MOD consistent with legitimate local requirements. We are considering the preparations of an environmental impact assessment once our future disposal plans are clearer. The environmental impact arising from further development of the airfield, after disposal by the MOD, and any question of compensation that may arise would, of course, be for a new owner of the airfield to resolve.

The MOD will consider all proposals for development of Thurleigh airfield in the period leading up to disposal on their merits, subject to their not prejudicing the longer-term disposal strategy.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) of 20 June, *Official Report*, columns *314-15*, whether any members of the armed services are serving in Iraq.

Mr. Archie Hamilton : I can confirm that the answer I gave on 20 June at columns *314-15* did not include the members of the armed forces deployed to northern Iraq as a temporary measure to provide humanitarian assistance to Kurdish refugees. Members of the Royal Marines continue to operate in the areas providing reassurance and security to the Kurds.

Service Men Overseas

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) *Official Report*, 20 June, columns *314-15*, if he will set out *(a)* the number of members of the armed services who are currently serving in each of the countries listed in the 1991 columns and *(b)* the reasons for their deployment in each country listed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest detailed information available for deployment of United Kingdom manpower overseas, was at 30 June 1990, without incurring disproportionate cost, is as follows:

	Number
Federal Republic of Germany (stationed forces)	61,109
Elsewhere in continental Europe (stationed forces)	7,281
Gibraltar (garrison)	1,835
Cyprus (garrison and UNFICYP)	4,776
Elsewhere in Mediterranean, Near East and Gulf	[2]1,267
Hong Kong (garrison)	2,118
Elsewhere in Far East	453
Other locations (including Falklands and Belize garrisons)	8,357

Notes:

1. The figures include personnel on loan to countries in the areas shown and personnel at sea in each area. Defence attaches and advisers and their staffs are included under "other locations". The figure for the Federal Republic of Germany includes personnel serving in Northern Ireland on emergency tours of duty but remaining under the command of the Commander-in-Chief BAOR. The figures exclude non-United Kingdom manpower, including Gurkhas and locally engaged personnel.

2. Around 1,200 personnel are currently serving in Iraq and some 340 in Kuwait. Loan service personnel are employed on a variety of military assistance tasks for the following overseas governments (as at 31 March 1991):

Antigua
Australia
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbadoes
Belize
Bermuda
Brunei
Colombia
Dominica
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Hong Kong
Jordan
Kenya
Lesotho
Malaysia
Mauritius
Namibia
New Zealand
Oman
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Swaziland
Turks and Caicos Islands
United Arab Emirates

Details of tasks and numbers of loan service personnel are normally confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the Government concerned.

"Panorama"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the BBC "Panorama" programme on weapons development and arms sales, broadcast on 24 June.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has a copy of this programme.

Low Flying

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the crashes and fatalities that have occurred in Wales involving low-flying military aircraft in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Between 1 January 1981 and 27 June 1991 there were the following aircraft accidents involving low-flying military aircraft in Wales:

Date	*Aircraft*	*Location*	*Fatalities*
12 February 1982	RAF Harrier	8 nautical miles South of Corwen	1
22 April 1982	RAF Jet Provost	Nant-y-Moch Reservoir	0
13 May 1982	RAF Hunter	2 nautical miles North West of Claerwen Reservoir	0
5 August 1982	RAF Hunter	4 nautical miles North West of Carmarthen	0
20 April 1983	RAF Gazelle	2 nautical miles North East of Snowdon	2
17 June 1986	WGAF Tornado	Near Claerwen	2
24 July 1986	USAF Phantom	St. Bride's Bay	2
24 June 1987	RAF Jaguar	3 miles South East of Builth Wells	1
26 August 1987	RAF Phantom	8 nautical miles South of Aberystwyth	2
6 February 1990	USAF A10	Capel-y-ffin	1
9 May 1990	RAF Hawk	2 KM North West of RAF Valley	0
10 May 1991	RN Sea Harrier	Near RAF Caerwent	0

Land Holdings (Scotland)

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the amount of land owned or leased by the Ministry in Scotland on a regional basis.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 1 April 1991, the total area, in hectares, of land and foreshore owned or leased by the Ministry of Defence in Scotland by region was:

	Hectares
Highland	5,210
Strathclyde	5,200
Dumfries and Galloway	4,209
Grampian	2,207
Tayside	1,454
Western Isles	1,339
Fife	1,328
Lothian	1,160
Central	80
Shetland Islands	46
Orkney Islands	5
Borders	—

All areas of leased land included in the totals are subject to leases of three years or more: those of shorter duration are regarded as temporary and not recorded centrally.

Vacant Property

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all those MOD properties in the Plymouth area, including Caradon, that are vacant at present; what is the length of time that they have been unoccupied; and what are his intentions for these properties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 31 March 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, 486 married quarters and seven Ministry of Defence civilian properties in the Plymouth area, including Caradon, were vacant. Of the married quarters 435 had been vacant for less than a year, 15 had been vacant for between one and two years and 36 had been vacant for over two years. The seven civilian properties had all been vacant for over six months. In addition, 130 dwellings were in the process of being sold. It is our policy to dispose of all housing which is surplus to our long-term requirements. However, not all empty

properties are surplus to requirements; many are either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation and some are already allotted to service families who are due to move in shortly.

Injured Grenadiers

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 25 June to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), what action had been taken, or will be taken, to prevent the recurrence of the accident in July 1989 to the Grenadier Guardsmen, Hicks, Povey and Ray; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are comprehensive arrangements for ensuring the safety of soldiers during live-firing exercises. The board of inquiry into this tragic accident considered that

"no amount of procedures, order, practices or briefings could have prevented the accident"

and that

"the accident represents one of the dangers associated with training with live ammunition on any training range".

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to ensure that the pension arrangements of Guardsman Hicks will be adequate for his housing, transport facilities and other capital needs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* Mr. Hicks is receiving a pension under the armed forces pension scheme and a war disablement pension at the 100 per cent. rate, plus clothing allowance and mobility supplement; the latter is to help specifically with the extra cost of getting about. In addition, constant attendance allowance and comforts allowance have been awarded. I understand that he is also receiving unemployment benefit. These payments total over £260 tax-free per week. He has also received lump sum payments under the armed forces pension scheme totalling £6,501·69.

Stump Socks

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many special socks have been provided to Guardsmen Povey, Hicks and Ray; and if he will make it his policy to supply such special socks free on demand.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 June 1991]:* Further to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence on 24 June, supplies of stump socks are available from individual health authorities on request. I am pleased to say that the men in question have used this service fully.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has carried out or is planning to carry out television advertising and other publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 on the following topics in the year ending 31 March 1992:

Royal Navy

Production of a television recruitment advertising and television advertising campaign.

Army

Production of a television/cinema recruiting advertisement and television/cinema advertising campaign.

Territorial Army

1. A combined TV/Press recruitment campaign highlighting the range of weekend activities in the Territorial Army.
2. A press campaign to recruit specialist personnel.

Tri-Service

1. Press campaign to thank employers for releasing Volunteer Reserve Forces personnel for service during the Gulf crisis.
2. Campaign to increase public awareness of Volunteer Reserve Forces and employers' support for them.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 2 July 1991

TRANSPORT

Piracy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by year for the last 10 years, and by location, the number of incidents of piracy at sea involving United Kingdom merchant seafarers.

Mr. McLoughlin: Shipowners, flag states and coastal states are encouraged to report incidents of piracy to the International Maritime Organisation. When we are advised of incidents involving British ships we report them to the International Maritime Organisation. However, it is not mandatory to report incidents of piracy so records may be incomplete. Nor is it possible to identify from the reports that are made if British seafarers serving on foreign flag vessels were victims of piracy. The reports made to the International Maritime Organisation indicate that since 1984 there were 11 incidents of piracy involving British ships:

Year	*Number*	*Location*
1984	2	Singapore (2)
1985	1	Singapore
1987	6	Singapore (4) Indonesia India
1988	1	Brazil
1989	1	Sri Lanka

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by year for the last 10 years, and by location, the number of United Kingdom merchant seafarers who have been *(a)* killed, *(b)* injured and *(c)* reported missing after attacks of piracy on the high seas.

Mr. McLoughlin: No British seafarer serving on a British ship has been reported killed or missing as the result of an act of piracy in recent years. Information regarding injuries or about British seafarers serving on foreign flag vessels is not available.

International Maritime Bureau

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last had discussions with officials of the International Maritime Bureau; what was discussed; when he next expects to have discussions with officials from the International Maritime Bureau; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have not met the International Maritime Bureau and have no plans to do so.

British Rail (Inflammable Goods)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss measures to ensure that the inquiry into the derailment of a freight train carrying inflammable goods at Bradford on Tone on 16 May proceeds with expedition and the steps which will be taken to ensure that hon. Members are notified of any preliminary conclusion from this inquiry as soon as possible.

Mr. McLoughlin: British Rail is carrying out an internal inquiry into this derailment. It will send a full report to the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate, which is also holding a technical investigation into the accident. BR reports, and those of investigations under section 20 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, are not normally published, but I have asked the chief inspecting officer to let me know the conclusions of the investigations. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Northolt Airport

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans for the use of Northolt airport by civil aircraft.

Mr. McLoughlin: RAF Northolt is used by both military and civil aircraft. There are no plans to alter this arrangement.

Passenger Safety

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he intends taking following the Clapham rail crash to ensure that the safety lessons learnt in one section of the transport world are passed on to other travel modes.

Mr. Freeman: We shall continue to ensure that accidents are thoroughly investigated and that any wider lessons are identified and applied across the modes.

Flight Delays, London-Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on any delays caused by Madrid air controllers to flights between London and Gibraltar that can be attributed to non-operational reasons.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not aware of any such delays.

Ferries (Safety)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research there is available to his Department into passenger safety on ferries; and which of these receive funds from Government.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The Secretary of State sponsored a comprehensive research programme in 1988 aimed at enhancing the survivability standards of roll on/roll off passenger ferries. The initial phase of that programme was completed last year. Copies of the reports were sent to interested parties and a report giving an overview of the whole programme was placed in the House of Commons Library.

Government-funded research has also been undertaken in recent years to study the effect of damage to roll on/roll

off passenger ferries in shallow waters; to investigate the evacuation of passengers from roll on/roll off passenger ships and to produce a risk analysis.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give *(a)* the total number of ferries using British ports, *(b)* those over 10 years old and *(c)* those over 25 years old for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* Figures for 1990-91 for roll on/roll off passenger ferries using United Kingdom ports are set out below. Figures for earlier years are not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	1990	*1991*
Over 10 years old	[1]85	[1]89
Over 25 years old	8	9
Total	113	110

[1] Figure *includes* vessels over 25 years old.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many reported shipping accidents there were *(a)* in British waters and *(b)* involving British ships; and if he will give the number and percentage of those involving ferries for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) The statistics maintained do not distinguish between shipping accidents in United Kingdom and non-United Kingdom territorial waters.

(b) The number of reported accidents worldwide involving United Kingdom registered merchant vessels over 100 gross tonnes for the period 1981 to 1990 is:

Year	*Number of United Kingdom vessel accidents*
1981	430
1982	413
1983	284
1984	269
1985	237
1986	188
1987	152
1988	190
1989	210
1990	183

The number of reported accidents involving United Kingdom registered passenger and/or cargo ro-ro ferries worldwide for 1989 and 1990 (the only years for which figures are readily obtainable) is:

	1989	*1990*
Number of ro-ro ferry accidents	42	44
Number of United Kingdom vessel accidents	210	183
Percentage of United Kingdom vessel accidents	20·00	24.04

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the Government risk analysis figures for United Kingdom ferry travel for *(a)* collisions involving a ferry, *(b)* a collision induced capsize, *(c)* flooding and *(d)* ferry fires for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of accidents on United Kingdom passenger ferries recorded in a recent risk analysis study for the period 1 January 1978 to 30 April 1988 was as follows:

(a) four collisions; 1980, 1982, 1983 and 1987

(b) one collision leading to capsize; 1982

(c) one flooding; 1987, and

(d) seven serious fires; 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983 (two) and 1988 (two).

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The following topics are expected to be the subject of television campaigns in the current financial year:

Child road safety

Drinking and driving

The following other topics are expected to be the subject of campaigns costing over £100,000 in the current financial year:

Transport and the environment

Coastguard advice for users of coastal waters

Road Traffic Act

"Safety on the Move" exhibition programme.

ENERGY

British Coal

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the British Coal complaint to the European Commission on the dumping of coal in the Community.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is for the European Commission to consider British Coal's complaint and take action if necessary. The Commission has not, at this stage, reached a decision on whether to launch a formal investigation.

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library details of the advice he received from Coopers and Lybrand between July 1989 and April 1990 on salaries appropriate for the privatised electricity industry.

Mr. Wakeham: No. Advice given to the Secretary of State is confidential.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Race Relations (Legal Aid)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will extend legal aid to discrimination cases involving race relations; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Legal advice and assistance from a solicitor is available under the green form scheme,

subject to the normal financial conditions, where there is no reasonable expectation of an applicant obtaining help from an alternative source such as a trade union or the Commission for Racial Equality.

In addition, where civil remedies are sought under the Race Relations Act 1976, legal aid is available for legal representation in county court proceedings, under the normal conditions.

Maguire Judgment

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will arrange for a copy of the Maguire judgment to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

The Attorney-General: The approved transcript of the judgment of the Court of Appeal in the Maguire case is not yet available. I will cause copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament as soon as it is received.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Capital Flows

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the latest available information on inward and outward capital flows between the United Kingdom and other EC member states and the United Kingdom and north America for each year from 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Maples: Information by country on direct investment abroad by United Kingdom companies and by overseas companies in the United Kingdom is given in tables 5 and 9 of CSO Bulletin 33/91 "Overseas Direct Investment 1989". Figures for earlier years are given in the "Business Monitor MA4 (Overseas Transactions)". Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Some additional information on capital transactions with countries and institutions of the European Community is given in the published annual Pink Books on the United Kingdom balance of payments and is available from the CSO databank, both of which are available in the Library.

Advertising Agencies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which advertising agencies were on the Central Office of Information approved list in 1986; which have been added in each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement on how the system works.

Mr. Maples: The Central Office of Information does not keep a list of approved advertising agencies. Advertising agencies are appointed to work for Government following competitions between agencies nominated by the Advisory Committee on Advertising. The advisory committee is an independent group of media and marketing professionals appointed to advise on the nomination of suitable advertising agencies for Government work.

Woolwich Tax Model

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on which day or days, in any hearing, counsel for the Inland Revenue challenged the Woolwich tax model of the effects of regulations 3 and 11 (1985).

Mr. Maples: The Inland Revenue's response, challenging the conclusions of the Woolwich building society based on its hypothetical tax model, was set out in affidavits which were in evidence in all the courts up to the House of Lords.

THE ARTS

Provincial Amateur Orchestras

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list the provincial amateur orchestras encouraged by his Department.

Mr. Renton: Last year no fewer than 132 amateur orchestras, as listed, received support from the English regional arts associations and the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils.

Support for amateur orchestras by the regional arts associations and the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils is usually through the payment of the fees of professionals working with the orchestras. Some organisations pay support directly to the orchestras; others channel the support through independently constituted bodies like the Welsh Amateur Music Federation.

I have listed the orchestras supported in this way by the original funding agency.

Scottish Arts Council
Dundee Orchestral Society
Edinburgh Symphony Orchestra
Glasgow Chamber Orchestra
Glasgow Orchestral Society
Helensburgh Orchestral Society
Kirkaldy Orchestral Society
Meadows Chamber Orchestra, Edinburgh
Perth Orchestral Society
St. James Orchestra, Paisley

Welsh Arts Council
Abergavenny Orchestra
City of Cardiff Symphony Orchestra
Philomusica of Aberystwyth
St. Mary's Orchestra, Monmouth
University College (Cardiff) Choir and Orchestra
University College of North Wales (Bangor) Orchestra

Eastern Arts
Bedfordshire Orchestral Society
Bushey Symphony Orchestra
Cambridge Philharmonic
Cambridge University Music Society
Essex Symphony Orchestra
Hatfield Philharmonic Orchestra
Haverhill Sinfonia
Hertford Symphony Orchestra
Hitchin Concert Orchestra
Huntingdonshire Philharmonic
Ipswich Orchestra Society
Luton Symphony Orchestra
Norwich Philharmonic
Peterborough Philharmonic
Southend Symphony Orchestra
Watford Philharmonic Society
Welwyn Garden City Music Society
Wolsey Chamber Orchestra, Ipswich

East Midlands Arts
Chesterfield Symphony Orchestra
Northampton Symphony Orchestra
Nottingham Symphony Orchestra
Rutland Sinfonia

Greater London Arts
Chelsea Opera Group
Collegium Musicum of London
Croydon Philharmonic Society
Ealing Symphony Orchestra
Ernest Read Symphony Orchestra
Forest Philharmonic Society
Kensington Symphony Orchestra
Royal Orchestral Society for Amateur Music
Salomon Orchestra
Tallis Chamber Orchestra Society
Westminster Philharmonic Orchestra
Wimbledon Symphony Orchestra

Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts
Hull Philharmonic Orchestra
Lincoln Symphony Orchestra
Stamford Chamber Orchestra

Merseyside Arts
Liverpool Mozart Orchestra
Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral Concerts Society

Northern Arts
Darlington Orchestra
Durham Sinfonia
New Tyneside Orchestral Society
West Lakeland Orchestra Society
Westmorland Orchestra

North West Arts
Blackburn Sinfonia
Haffner Orchestra, Lancaster
Oldham Symphony Orchestra
Wilmslow Symphony Orchestra

Southern Arts
Abingdon and District Music Society
Aylesbury Orchestral Society
Basingstoke Symphony Orchestra
City of Southampton Orchestra
Havant and District Orchestral Society
Henley Symphony Orchestra
Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra
Milton Keynes Sinfonia
Newbury Symphony Orchestra
Oxford Symphony Orchestra
Petersfield Orchestra
RAE Symphony Orchestra, Farnborough
Reading Symphony Orchestra
Winchester Music Club
Windsor and Maidenhead Symphony Orchestra
Woodstock Music Society
Wycombe Sinfonia

South East Arts
Canterbury Orchestra
Claud Powell Concerts Society, Guildford
Dartford Symphony Orchestra
Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra
Epsom Symphony Orchestra
Folkestone and Hythe Orchestral Society
Jupiter Chamber Orchestra, Haywards Heath
Maidstone Orchestral Society
Mid Sussex Sinfonia
Oare String Orchestra
Redhill Society of Instrumentalists
Rochester Arts Orchestra
Sevenoaks Symphony Orchestra
Surrey Philarmonic Society
Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
University of Kent Orchestra
Woking Mozart Players
Woking Symphony Orchestra

North West Arts
Bath Symphony Orchestra
Bristol Opera Company
Cheltenham Philharmonic Orchestra
Cornwall Youth Percussion Ensemble
Devon Opera
Dorset Philharmonic Society
Duchy Opera
East Cornwall Bach Festival
Exeter Musical Society
Exmouth Choral and Orchestral Society
Glastonbury Music Co-operative
Gloucester Opera
Gloucestershire Symphony Orchestra
Keynsham Orchestra
New Stroud Orchestra
Plymouth Symphony Orchestra
Somerset County Orchestra
Somerset Opera Group
Wedmore Opera

West Midlands Arts
Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra
Leamington Chamber Orchestra
Sutton Coldfield Chamber Orchestra
Warwickshire Symphony Orchestra

Yorkshire Arts
Airedale Symphony Orchestra, Shipley
Guildhall Orchestra, York
Halifax Orchestral Society
Harrogate Chamber Orchestra
Huddersfield Philharmonic Society
Settle Orchestra
Sheffield Philharmonic Orchestra
Sinfonia of Leeds
Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra
Todmorden Orchestra
York Symphony Orchestra

British Library

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the progress of the new British Library building at St. Pancras.

Mr. Renton: I am happy to announce the timely completion of the first of a number of major handover targets which will be taking place over the next 18 months at St. Pancras. Basement 4, the deepest of the book storage basements, is essentially ready for occupation by the British Library. This achievement reflects great credit on PSA services and its design and construction teams as well as on all those who are associated with the construction of this magnificent building. The project is thus on schedule and the present prediction is that it will be completed within budget.

ENVIRONMENT

Contaminated Land

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that local authorities have adequate resources to compile registers on contaminated land sites.

Mr. Baldry: The estimated costs of compiling registers of land which may be contaminated will be taken into consideration in the local authority finance settlement for 1992-93.

Integrated Pollution Control

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the effect on pollution of the decision to delay the implementation of the new system of integrated pollution control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Integrated pollution control was introduced by part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, for which Royal Assent had originally been expected by July 1990. In the event, there was some slippage in the legislative process, mainly as a result of extended consideration at Committee stage in this House, and Royal Assent was not obtained until November.

When it became apparent that Royal Assent would be later than had been anticipated, we announced that implementation of the IPC system, originally planned for 2 January 1991, would be delayed to allow an adequate period for consultation with interested parties and the public on guidance notes and regulations to be issued.

My right hon. Friend has made no estimate of the effect that this slight delay in implementation has had on pollution; IPC came into operation on 1 April 1991, and all the prescribed processes will be phased into the system over the next five years.

Catalytic Reductions

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to establish a selective catalytic reduction system in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: Selective catalytic reduction is one of a number of techniques for reducing emissions of nitrogen oxide from combustion plant, and guidance to inspectors from the chief inspector, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution suggests that it is one of the abatement options which operators of large combustion plant should consider.

Toxic Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of hazardous and toxic waste is *(a)* produced and *(b)* processed by each member country of the EC.

Mr. Baldry: There are at present no reliable figures on the production and processing of hazardous and toxic waste in member states of the EC. However, authoritative figures should be available in the future. EC directive 91/156 requires the competent authority or authorities of member states to draw up waste management plans indicating, among other things, the type, quantity and origin of waste to be recovered or disposed of; any special arrangements for particular wastes; and suitable disposal sites or installations. The directive will come into force on 1 April 1993. In addition, the statistical office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) is undertaking a study on waste statistics as part of its current four-year work programme. It is estimated that in 1989-90 the United Kingdom generated between 2 and 2·5 million tonnes of special waste—the United Kingdom definition of hazardous and toxic waste—which were disposed of outside the premises of production.

Housing, Tower Hamlets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing units were built in Tower Hamlets each year from 1961 to 1990 by *(a)* boroughs, *(b)* London-wide authorities, *(c)* housing associations, *(d)* other public sector and *(e)* the private sector.

Mr. Yeo: The London borough of Tower Hamlets has not sent the Department any statistical returns about housebuilding in its area since 1984. The available information is shown in the table.

Permanent dwellings completed: London Borough of Tower Hamlets[1]

(number of dwellings)

	Private sector	*Local authority*		*Housing associations and other public sector*[3]	*All dwellings*
		Tower Hamlets[2]	*Greater London Council*[2,4]		
1961	19	251	..	0	..
1962	13	278	..	0	..
1963	3	446	..	0	..
1964	14	469	..	0	..
1965	26	271	..	0	..
1966	12	355	489	0	856
1967	12	359	767	48	1,186
1968	20	911	1,209	5	2,145
1969	14	905	1,024	8	1,951
1970	23	869	811	11	1,714
1971	43	361	708	15	1,127
1972	113	708	610	4	1,435
1973	56	249	425	52	782
1974	111	575	704	1	1,391
1975	6	225	787	0	1,018
1976	16	286	682	0	984
1977	3	1,267	598	2	1,870
1978	0	203	726	0	929
1979	0	280	424	0	704
1980	0	405	509	0	914
1981	0	376	504	0	880
1982	43	35	239	0	317

	Private sector	Local authority		Housing associations and other public sector[5]	All dwellings
		Tower Hamlets[2]	Greater London Council[3,4]		
1983	0	31	402	0	433
1984[6]	146	0	69	0	..
1985	..	..	85	..	..
1986	..	..	0	..	..
1987	..	..	..	..	..
1988	..	..	..	..	..
1989	..	..	..	..	..
1990	..	..	..	..	..

[1] The London borough of Tower Hamlets was established in 1965. It comprised the metropolitan boroughs of Bethnal Green, Poplar and Stepney. Figures for total housing completions in these three boroughs are shown for the period 1961 to 1965.
[2] Figures show number of dwellings completed by the authority and some of these may have been outside the borough.
[3] Completions by London county council (ie prior to 1966) are not available by area of building.
[4] The Greater London council was established in 1965 and abolished in 1986.
[5] Prior to 1980 housing association and other public sector completions in the borough are not available separately. The figures have not been shown separately after that date as the local authority has reported nil activity under both headings.
[6] Private sector, borough and other public sector information covers ten months of the year only.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received on the management of sheltered leasehold housing.

Mr. Yeo: Since 1 January we have received 15 letters from hon. Members and five from leaseholders themselves. These have dealt with various matters relating to the management of sheltered housing; the most common issue has been the freeholder's selection of managing agents.

Retirement Leaseholders

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of the National Alliance of Retirement Leaseholders; and what points were discussed.

Mr. Yeo: I with my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir. T. Taylor) met representatives of the National Alliance of Private Retirement Leaseholders on 15 May. We discussed the management of sheltered accommodation, and, in particular, problems arising from the appointment of managing agents by the landlord and the feasibility of giving leaseholders a right to appoint managers themselves.

Politically Restricted Posts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people currently hold politically restricted posts as defined by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Portillo: My Department does not collect this information. I understand, however, that there are in the region of 35,000 politically restricted posts in the local government service in England.

South Park School, Lincoln

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his decision to call in the planning application submitted on behalf of Lincolnshire county council for the erection of dwellings at South Park school, Lincoln, application No. LHO4/0219/91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State has not called in this application. On 20 June the Department's east midlands regional office issued an article 14 direction preventing the county council from granting itself deemed consent for this proposal without special authorisation. This was done to enable the Secretary of State to examine the proposal in detail before deciding whether or not to call it in for his own determination.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that mentally handicapped adults and children moving into a local authority area shall carry with them a sum of money for local authority grant purposes taken from the area they have left and transferred to their new local authority in the year after they have moved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* In cases where a local authority has responsibility for such persons, financial arrangements resulting from moves to another area are a matter for the authorities concerned. A local authority's standard assessment will reflect, in due course, changes which influence the cost of providing a standard level of social services, including those for people with learning disabilities.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will show for each local authority *(a)* the budgeted increase or reduction in financial reserves for 1990-91 and 1991-92, expressed both in million pounds and pounds per adult, using the appropriate figure for relevant population and *(b)* political control in each of the above financial years.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* I have today arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Bathing Water

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many inland waterways have been designated as safe for swimming by Her Majesty's Government under the European Commission bathing water directive.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The criteria set for the identification of bathing waters in the EC directive are the number of bathers using the waters, and the provision of facilities such as car parks, toilets and changing facilities. No inland waters meet the definition of bathing water in the directive or the criteria for identification developed since the adoption of the directive.

Local Authority Usable Receipts

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate for local authority usable receipts in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* I have made no estimate of local authority usable capital receipts for 1992-93. Local authorities have been asked to provide forecasts for 1991-92 and an estimate based on the available returns will be made shortly. I will provide this information as soon as it is available.

Household Waste

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to promote the recycling of household waste.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend is bringing into force the duty on waste collection authorities to produce recycling plans on 1 August 1991. Authorities are being asked to submit their plans to him in draft by 1 August 1992.

We will be sending a copy of waste management paper No. 28 on recycling to all local authorities next week. The paper provides guidance on preparing recycling strategies and drawing up recycling plans. It will be available through HMSO.

We will also start consultation on our proposals for recycling credits next week. Copies of the consultation paper and the waste management paper will be placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Portugal and Luxembourg

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, columns *390-91*, if he will make a statement on the available data on volumes of exports for *(a)* Portugal and *(b)* Luxembourg.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department is not aware of any publication which provides export volume figures for Portugal or Luxembourg on an internationally comparable basis.

Eurostats calculates the volume series for member countries for internal Commission use, but they do not show Luxembourg separately because its trade figures are combined with Belgium.

European Community

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sources of statistical data on trade figures of other EC member countries are available to his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: The following sources of trade statistics for EC member countries are available to the Department: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the statistical office of the European Communities, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the national statistics of each member country.

Link Initiative

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public funding was originally earmarked for the Link initiative when it was launched in 1986; how much was provided in the estimates for that and for each succeeding financial year; on which votes these estimates have been carried; how much has been disbursed on each such vote in each such financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply to this question on Link funding and expenditure, although the question as put cannot be answered without disproportionate cost. When the Link initiative was announced on 10 December 1986 by the then Prime Minister, the Government contribution was to be £210 million spread over five years. This assumed a roughly linear build-up to a steady-state Government funding target of £85 million per annum; the agreed planning figures for Departments are shown in table A. The first five programmes were announced in

February 1988, and currently there are 28 programmes in existence; the Government commitment to them is £175 million, and table B shows the funding commitment of individual Departments to programmes.

Table C shows expenditure to date, which significantly lags work under way because participants are very slow in submitting claims for reimbursement. The total spent will be approximately double the Government expenditure by virtue of industry's own expenditure. There are now over 150 projects under way and nearly 100 more approved, at a total value of around £150 million. After a slow start, Link is now making good progress.

Table A
Link

Department targets	*1992-93* *£ million*	*1988-89 to 1992-93* *£ million*
DTI	25	62·5
DES (Research Councils)	25	62·5
MoD	15	36·0
DEn	5	12·0
MAFF	4	9·5
DoE	2	5·0
DTp	1	2·5
DH	1	2·5
SO, WO, NIO	7	17·0
TOTAL	85	[1]210

[1] Rounded.

Table B
Link

Departmental commitment (June '91)	*£ million*[1]
DTI	92·2
DES (research councils)+	59·9+
MoD	3·7
DEn	3·0
MAFF	9·4
DoE	0·8
DTp	4·1
DH	1·8
SO, WO, NIO	0·4
TOTAL	[1]175·0

[1] Rounded.
+ SERC £51·8 million, AFRC £3·6 million, MRC £1·5 million, NERC £3·0 million.

Table C
Link

£000

Departmental spend (FY)	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Total*
DTI	50·6	1,767·1	3,543·5	5,361·2
DES (research councils)	117·8	783·5	3,186·9	4,088·2
MoD	—	—	—	18·1
DEn	—	—	—	—
MAFF	—	10·0	166·6	176·6
DoE	30·0	43·8	6·5	80·3
DTp	—	—	24·1	24·1
DH	—	—	—	—
SO, WO, NIO	—	—	0·2 (SOAFD)	0·2
TOTAL	198·4	2,604·4	6,927·8	9,748·7

Industrial Design

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his plans for new legislation on industrial design.

Mr. Leigh: New legislation on the protection of industrial design came into force on 1 August 1989 as part of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, when the Government introduced a wholly new kind of protection in the form of an unregistered design right. Some changes were also made to the existing registered design system. The European Commission is currently examining the question of design protection with a view to issuing a consultative document.

Trade Marks

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans he has for action in relation to trade marks infringements;

(2) what plans he has to update the Trade Marks Act 1938.

Mr. Leigh: The Government's proposals for updating the law on trade marks, including the provisions concerning infringement of trade marks, were set out in the White Paper, "Reform of Trade Marks Law" (Cm. 1203), which was published last September. As stated in the White Paper, legislation to implement these proposals will be introduced as soon as the parliamentary timetable permits.

Pharmaceutical Patents

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his most recent response to representations from the pharmaceutical industry for extension of its patent rights in the bracket of 10 to 20 years.

Mr. Leigh: On 12 June I confirmed to European Standing Committee B that the Government support the EC Commission's proposal to give supplementary protection certificates to patented medicinal products but with a maximum extension of five years and a limit of 13 years on the resulting effective protection.

Dangerous Animals

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many children aged under 16 years were *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed by (i) dogs and (ii) other animals in 1990.

Mr. Leigh: National estimates for numbers of injured children under 16 for 1988, the last year for which figures are available, are as follows:

	Number
Injuries from dog bites	56,000
Injuries involving other animals	34,000

Egypt

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance has been given by Her Majesty's Government to British companies since 1987 seeking contracts in Egypt.

Mr. Sainsbury: The full range of DTI export services is available to British companies wishing to do business in Egypt. ECGD cover for short-term business (up to 180 days) is available subject to payments being secured by an irrevocable letter of credit.

Units of Measurement

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation on phasing out the use of imperial units following the adoption of the 1989 amendment to the units of measurement directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: Having considered the replies to my Department's consultation paper, I intend to amend the legislation on the units of measurement authorised for use in the United Kingdom, generally taking maximum advantage of the transitional arrangements in the directive, and accordingly to:

(i) cease to authorise after 31 December 1994, imperial units used for economic, public health, public safety and administrative purposes except for the units used for the purposes set out in (ii) and (iii);

(ii) cease to authorise after 31 December 1999:
- *(a)* the pound and ounce for goods sold loose from bulk;
- *(b)* the pint and fluid ounce for beer, cider, waters, lemonades and fruit juices in returnable containers;
- *(c)* the fathom for marine navigation; and
- *(d)* the therm for gas supply;

(iii) authorise the continued use, without time limit, of:
- *(a)* the mile, yard, foot and inch for road traffic signs and related distances and speed measurement;
- *(b)* the pint for dispensing draught beer and cider and for milk in returnable containers;
- *(c)* the troy ounce for transactions in precious metals; and
- *(d)* the acre for land registration purposes.

Metric units will continue to be authorised for use in the United Kingdom for economic, public health, public safety and administrative purposes.

Changes to other legislation which refers to imperial units of measurement will be a matter for the Government Departments and other bodies responsible for that legislation.

Defence Industries

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communication his Department has had with local authorities concerning the application of the European Community's Stride programme on the possibilities for conversion or technological reorientation of regional defence industries.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 13 June 1991]:* At the moment, the details of the allocation of Stride money in the United Kingdom are still being agreed with the European Commission. Once this is finalised, the possible use of Stride for regional projects such as the reorientation of defence industries, will be discussed in the programme committee on which local authorities will be represented.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implementation of projects sponsored by the European Community's Sprint programme in the United Kingdom; how many companies and organisations are presently receiving support; and what assessment he has made of the benefit to the United Kingdom economy of the Sprint initiative.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 13 June 1991]:* Sprint aims to stimulate technology transfer within the European Community. The programme has been in operation for six years. Over 100 United Kingdom companies and organisations are actively involved in Sprint, more than any other EC country. It is too early to judge the full benefits to the United Kingdom economy, but already over 260 agreements to transfer technology have been signed. United Kingdom companies are involved in a significant number of those agreements.

Output Prices

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase in the prices of output since October 1990 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Germany.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 25 June 1991]:* I have been asked to reply.

Between 1990 quarter 3 and 1991 quarter 1 the implied deflator of United Kingdom GDP rose by 2¼ per cent. and the implied deflator of GNP in Germany rose by 1 per cent. Both these figures are measured at market prices. The implied deflator of GDP measures the prices of the net output of total goods and services in the economy. Figures based on GNP have been used for Germany because they are the most comparable available.

WALES

Blind Students

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what arrangements are being made by his Department to ensure that examination papers for the GCSE are available in Braille;

(2) what is his Department's policy on ensuring that blind and partially sighted students have adequate access to the examination process.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The responsibility for administering the examination process rests with individual examining boards. The joint council for the GCSE have issued guidance common to all examing groups to deal with pupils with disabilities such as a visual impairment. The Welsh Joint Education Committee issues GCSE and A-level papers in Braille when requested.

Employment Training

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that adults with learning difficulties in Wales are given adequate opportunities for employment training.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The responsibility for ensuring appropriate provision under employment training now rests with training and enterprise councils (TECs). All TECs are required to address the need of adults with learning difficulties in their corporate and business plans. The additional resources for employment training announced on 19 June 1991 will be targeted on people with special training needs, in particular those with literacy and numeracy difficulties. In addition negotiations are taking place with two TECs in Wales to pilot centres to encourage trainees to improve basic literacy and numeracy and promote the use of City and Guilds Certificates in word power and number power.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wrongful Imprisonment

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the criteria by which he determines what level of compensation to pay to people who have been wrongfully imprisoned; and whether he has any plans to alter these criteria.

Mr. John Patten: When my right hon. Friend has determined that payment of compensation following a wrongful conviction is justified, the amount to be paid is assessed by an independent assessor. The assessor applies principles analogous to those governing the assessment of damages for civil wrongs.

The assessment takes account of both pecuniary and non-pecuniary loss arising from the conviction and/or loss of liberty, including matters such as damage to character or reputation, hardship (including mental suffering) and inconvenience, loss of earnings and future earning capacity, legal costs, and other additional expenses arising in consequence of detention including expenses incurred by the immediate family

We have no plans at present to amend these arrangements.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will outline the procedures used by the Metropolitan police to vet taxi drivers, describe the offences for which licenses are refused and outline the appeals procedure open to the driver; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Applicants for cab drivers' licences are required to declare any previous convictions to the Public Carriage Office of the Metropolitan police. Appliations are checked against the national collection of criminal records. In considering whether or not to grant a licence regard is paid to the seriousness of any offences and to how long ago they were committed. A right of appeal against the refusal of a licence is contained in section 17 of the Transport Act 1985.

Police Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legislation is required to implement the police national computer network, the new criminal record system or the integration of police criminal information systems in general; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The need for legislation is one of the matters which is considered in preparing the case for new national information services for the police. It is presently being considered in relation to both a police national network and a new national criminal records system and would need to be examined in any proposal for the integration of police criminal information systems.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of each category found in the wanted and missing persons index of the police national computer; and whether he can include in these statistics an indication of the minimum and maximum size of each category in the index over the year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

Category		*Current*
Wanted		33,192
Fails to Appear		36,544
Suspect		21
Impending Prosecution		77
Deserter		1,367
Locate		51,582
Missing		2,460
Found		15
Absconder	—from care	484
	—from hospital	81
	—from detention	4
	—from youth custody	112
	—from prison	1,140
	—from remand	11
	—from school	36
Recall	—from detention	0
	—from youth custody	2
	—from prison	319

Figures on the minimum and maximum size of each category over the past year are not available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many subject access requests were made under the Data Protection Act 1984 to the Metropolitan police for each year since 1987; and what proportion were made to criminal records.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the number of subject access requests made to the Metropolitan police in each year since 1987 was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987	23
1988	423
1989	1,131
1990	1,647
[1]1991	399

[1] March.

Statistics are not kept on the proportion of requests which relate to criminal records, but it is estimated that the vast majority of requests were for this purpose.

The vast majority sought access to criminal names.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of each index of the police national computer; and whether he can include in these statistics an indication of the minimum and maximum size of each index over the last year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

Index	*Current size*
Vehicle owners	39,017,200
Stolen vehicles	547,332
Chassis-engine numbers	914,274
Wanted/missing persons	131,948
Cross reference	706,363
Disqualified drivers	382,298
Convictions	3,827,885
Criminal names	5,783,622
Fingerprints	4,270,292
Crime pattern analysis	110,059
Extremists crime index	1,152
Major investigations	330,939

Information on the minimum and maximum size of each index over the last year has not been collected because of other essential work on preparing the database for its transfer to the new police national computer.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the number of accesses made to the police national computer by each constabulary in Great Britain over the last year; and whether he can give the proportion of access requests made to the vehicle indexes of the police national computer.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

Force	*Numbers of transactions for the year up to May 1991*	*Proportion of transactions made to vehicle indices*
Avon and Somerset	994,287	64·8
Bedfordshire	398,709	70·1
British Transport Police	161,730	43·1
Cambridgeshire	388,925	64·0
Central	159,990	52·9
Cheshire	440,291	60·2
City of London	99,339	64·6
Cleveland	357,058	60·7
Cumbria	386,831	62·8
Derbyshire	463,873	68·4
Devon and Cornwall	783,853	61·1
Dorset	515,411	59·2
Dumfries and Galloway	106,396	54·6
Durham	362,429	55·4
Dyfed-Powys	223,378	52·1
Essex	859,664	60·1
Fife	140,848	48·7
Gloucestershire	343,580	68·1
Grampian	290,132	54·0
Greater Manchester	2,436,529	60·6
Guernsey	16,491	6·5
Gwent	232,584	51·5
Hampshire	908,148	60·0
Hertfordshire	451,152	64·7
Humberside	548,998	60·2
Isle of Man	10,234	28·4
Jersey	35,232	5·4
Kent	1,139,038	64·1
Lancashire	1,172,783	57·2
Leicestershire	432,221	64·3
Lincolnshire	288,829	62·8
Lothian and Borders	680,544	62·3
Merseyside	935,499	55·8
Metropolitan	7,773,109	49·1
Norfolk	392,824	67·1
North Wales	346,732	45·1
North Yorkshire	489,871	69·4
Northamptonshire	345,864	69·2
Northern	200,871	51·2
Northumbria	1,124,897	70·5
Nottinghamshire	670,482	75·4
South Wales	895,957	62·6
South Yorkshire	706,531	73·9
Staffordshire	448,699	59·8
Strathclyde	1,341,243	39·2
Suffolk	323,544	61·2
Surrey	370,469	62·2
Sussex	784,633	53·3
Tayside	216,105	47·6
Thames Valley	892,968	60·8
Warwickshire	255,512	73·8
West Mercia	333,871	56·4
West Midlands	1,608,881	65·4
West Yorkshire	1,180,234	59·3
Wiltshire	299,116	67·6

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics he has as to the number of subject access requests made to criminal records held by the Metropolitan police or the police national computer that have been made for vetting purposes; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No statistics are available on this matter as applicants seeking subject access do not have to give reasons for their requests.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many accesses were made to each index of the police national computer over the last year; and whether he will include in these statistics an indication of the number of access requests that could search more than one index.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The total number of accesses to each of the indices of the police national computer in the year to 31 May 1991 was as follows:

	Index	*Number of accesses*
1.	Stolen and Suspect Vehicles	22,771,400
2.	Vehicle Owners	
3.	Chassis/Engine Numbers	453,842
4.	Fingerprints	194,074
5.	Fingerprints (Scenes of Crime)	13,021
6.	Criminal Names[1]	2,017,903
7.	Wanted/Missing Persons	2,144,103
8.	Disqualified Drivers	725,448
9.	Convictions	956,352
10.	Major Investigations	1,302
11.	Crime Pattern Analysis	296,535

There have also been the following joint accesses:

	Number
To indices 6 and 9[2]	2,017,903
To indices 6, 7 and 9	1,534,343
To indices 6, 7, 8 and 9	8,460,357
To indices 4, 6 and 9	606,569

[1] The figure for the year to June 1990 was 1,996,349 and not 1,094,072 as incorrectly given on 19 July 1990 at column 664.

[2] All access to the criminal names index will in addition automatically generate information from the convictions application.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of each category found in the stolen and suspect vehicle index of the police national computer; and whether he can include in these statistics an indication of the minimum and maximum size of each category in the index over the year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information requested is as follows:

Category	*Current*
Confirmed lost or obtained by deception	437,847
Lost or stolen	447,634
Obtained by deception	18
Found	31,712
Removed	16,764
Street to street	152
Repossessed by finance company	0
Suspect	42
Police vehicle	3,037
Blocked	6,980
Information	20,486
Seen	8,021

Information on the minimum and maximum of each category over the last year has not been collected because of other essential work on preparing the database for transfer to the new police national computer.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many subject access requests were made under the Data Protection Act 1984 to the police national computer for each year since 1987; and what proportion were made to the criminal names index.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1987	82
1988	2,628
1989	8,758
1990	13,848
[1]1991	8,413

[1]31 May.

Nearly all were made of the criminal names index, save in 1987 when the proportion was under 50 per cent.

Passport Offices

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the decision was taken to send passport applications from Peterborough to Belfast;

(2) how many unopened letters are there on a daily basis at each of the passport offices;

(3) how many unopened passport applications there are at the Peterborough office.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These questions have been passed to the chief executive of the United Kingdom Passport Agency who will reply shortly. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Police Station, Rutland

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on his Department's funding for the building of the new police station in Oakham, Rutland; and when it is scheduled to be completed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that work on the new police station at Oakham began in April and is expected to be completed in October 1992 at a cost of £1,125,000. This expenditure will be eligible for Home Office grant of 51 per cent.

Race Relations Act

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward legislation to extend the provisions of the Race Relations Act to all areas of governmental and regulatory activity, including the immigration, police and prison services; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Section 75 of the Race Relations Act 1976 states that the provisions of the Act as a whole apply to actions done by Ministers and Government Departments, and to actions done on their behalf, in the same way as they apply to the actions of a private person. It is for the courts to decide how the provisions should be interpreted.

If an on-duty police officer treats a person improperly on the grounds of that person's colour, race, nationality, or ethnic or national origin, he is committing an offence of racially discriminatory behaviour and can be disciplined under paragraph 9 of the police discipline code, which is set out in schedule 1 to the Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985.

The Commission for Racial Equality has recently launched a review of the 1976 Act; we will, of course, consider any recommendations which come out of the review, but at present we have no plans for legislation.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests he has received this year from local authorities for guidance on the enforcement of Sunday trading legislation.

Mrs. Rumbold: Between 1 January and 27 June this year inclusive we received, either directly or via hon. Members, 31 letters from local authorities about Sunday trading. Two of these specifically requested guidance on the enforcement of the Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act 1950.

Boundary Commission

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the terms of reference for the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England, fourth general review; what is its timetable; and what is its progress to date.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Boundary Commission for England is carrying out its fourth general review of constituencies under the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. Under the Act, it is required to

submit reports on all the constituencies in England to the Secretary of State not less than 10 nor more than 15 years after the submission of the previous such reports. The Commission is therefore required to report between February 1993 and February 1998.

Since the start of the review, in February, the Commission has obtained ward electorates from the 1991 electoral register. These have been updated to take account of ward changes up to 1 April. A list giving the electorate for each ward has been placed in the Library.

Later this month, the Commission will be considering its provisional recommendations for Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset; these will be published later this year.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list biographical details of each member of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is as follows:

The chairman of the Commission is the Speaker of the House of Commons.

The deputy chairman is Sir John Knox. He was called to the Bar in 1953, became a QC in 1979, and was appointed a judge of the Chancery Division of the High Court in 1985. He is also a member of the Lord Chancellor's Law Reform Committee.

Miss Sheila Cameron QC was called to the Bar in 1957 and became a QC in 1983. She is a deputy High Court judge, recorder, and vicar-general of the province of Canterbury and a member of the parliamentary, planning and local government Bar.

Mr. David Macklin CBE is a former chief executive of Devon county council and has also held local government posts in Derbyshire and Lincolnshire.

EMPLOYMENT

Disability and Employment

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response has been made to the recommendations of the Employment Select Committee's first report of Session 1990-91 on disability and employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the Chairman of the Select Committee on 15 January to express his pleasure at the participation of the Committee in the consultative process, to say that the Committee's comments will be given full consideration along with all others received and to commit himself to keeping the Committee informed on progress on all the issues they raised.

My right hon. and learned Friend wrote again on 17 April, to inform the Committee of the decision about the future development of the specialist services for people with disabilities which are provided by the Employment Services and to say that he believed that the changes which he announced would help to meet the concerns about disablement resettlement officers (DROs) expressed in the Committee's report.

The Committee will continue to be informed of appropriate decisions in line with the Secretary of State's commitment.

Earnings, Scotland

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 10 June, *Official Report*, column *435-38;* if he will provide the same information given in percentage form in terms of the absolute number of employees affected in each category.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Youth Training

Mr. Miscampbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many YOP, YTS and youth training places were available in Lancashire for each year since 1978 to 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is given in the following table. Information prior to 1985-86 is not readily available.

Youth training
Number of agreed places in Lancashire

At 31 March	*Number*
1986	7,100
1987	11,400
1988	15,800
1989	15,000
1990	13,900

Note: All figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
Source: SPECTRUM.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that adults with learning difficulties are given adequate opportunities for employment training.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils are required to set out in their business plans how they intend to offer suitable training to people with special needs, including learning difficulties. These plans form the basis of their contract with the Department. Those people joining employment training from the Government's guarantee and aim groups for long-term unemployed people will include substantial numbers of people with special training needs.

On 19 June the Secretary of State announced a package of measures including an additional £35 million for employment training, in particular to support training for people with special needs.

Disability Advisory Council

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will announce the membership of the new National Advisory Council on the Employment of People with Disabilities.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has appointed 12 new members and reappointed four existing members to the National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities for a period of three years from 1 July 1991. The chairman of the council is Mr. Alan Smith MBE, FIPM, FBIM, FinstD. His appointment runs until 31 December 1992, and has not been affected by the new appointments.

The members of the council are:

Members appointed after consultation with organisations representing employers

Mr. P. T. G. Hobbs MA (Oxon), FIPM, FInstD.
Mr. R. C. Spoor OBE, RD, DCL, (Hon), DL, FCA
Mr. A. Wild BA (Hons), MIPM

Members appointed after consultation with organisations representing workers

Mr. W. Anderson BSc (Econ), FLA
Mr. R. D. Exell
Mr. P. E. Gallant BSc, ARCS, C Chem, FRSC

Other Members

Ms. C. M. Ashton BSc (Hons)
Mr. I. Bruce BSocSc, FBIM
Mr. J. Denholm
Dr. A. Fingret MBBS, MFOM
Mr. P. Large MBE, CBE
Mr. P. MacDonald
Mr. W. H. Massie OBE
Dr. C. N. Morton CEng, MICE, MIPM
Mr. T. V. F. Pape BSc
Ms. S. Scott-Parker BA

The council has always provided valuable advice and assistance on issues concerning the employment and training of people with disabilities and I am sure that with the new membership it will continue to do so.

Textiles and Footwear Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what measures he intends to take to encourage the creation of alternative employment for textile and footwear workers who have been made redundant, with particular reference to the east midlands;

(2) what measures he intends to take to reverse the employment trends that have occurred in the textile and footwear industry since 1979.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* It is the private sector that will create alternative employment for textile and footwear workers made redundant in the east midlands or elsewhere. The work force in employment in the east midlands rose by 263,000 in the period March 1983 to December 1990.

The Department supports a number of initiatives in the textile and footwear industries aimed at increasing skill levels, meeting skill shortages, and strengthening the industries' ability to export.

The full range of services and facilities of the Department, the employment service, and the training and enterprise councils is available to assist employees who lose their jobs in the textile and footwear industry and other industries to find, and train for, alternative employment.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Correspondence

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will remind all Ministers of the requirement that with all ministerial replies to Members' letters, a copy of the Minister's letter must always be enclosed.

The Prime Minister: I have asked my hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary to write to Ministers' offices.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 2 July.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

University Funding

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet Sir Edward Parkes, chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, to discuss university funding.

The Prime Minister: I have told the CVCP that I am ready to meet them in due course to discuss their proposals for achieving the desired expansion of higher education with greater efficiency.

Information Bulletin

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the information bulletin on the activities of the United Kingdom delegation to the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and the assembly of the Western European Union which has been sent to him.

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

HEALTH

Maternity Services

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many maternity beds are available in each district health authority per 1,000 births;

(2) what is the number of special care baby cots in each district health authority per 1,000 births.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information is given in the following table. It should be noted that some health authorities provide special care facilities for neonates within maternity units. In these cases the cots are not counted separately and are therefore not included in the table.

Maternity beds and special care baby cots per thousand births by District Health Authority of occurrence, National Health Service hospitals, England 1989-90

Regional/District Health Authority	*Total maternity beds*			*Special care baby cots not in maternity wards*	
	Live births (thousands)	*Average daily number*	*Number per 1,000 births*	*Average daily number*	*Number per 1,000 births*
Northern RHA	38·95	1,058	27·2	262	6·7
Hartlepool	1·80	52	28·9	15	8·3
North Tees	2·27	74	32·6	19	8·4
South Tees	4·58	92	20·1	20	4·4

Regional/District Health Authority	Live births (thousands)	Total maternity beds: Average daily number	Total maternity beds: Number per 1,000 births	Special care baby cots not in maternity wards: Average daily number	Special care baby cots not in maternity wards: Number per 1,000 births
East Cumbria	2·09	58	27·8	15	7·2
South Cumbria	1·89	59	31·2	10	5·2
West Cumbria	1·65	51	30·9	10	6·1
Darlington	1·41	41	29·1	13	9·6
Durham	1·74	52	29·9	10	5·7
North West Durham	1·00	30	30·1	8	8·0
South West Durham	1·92	62	32·3	10	5·2
Northumberland	3·11	91	29·3	18	5·8
Gateshead	2·01	60	29·8	14	7·0
Newcastle	5·25	125	23·8	45	8·5
North Tyneside	1·93	57	29·5	15	7·8
South Tyneside	1·99	54	27·1	14	7·0
Sunderland	4·31	102	23·7	26	6·0
Yorkshire RHA	49·61	1,252	25·2	280	5·6
Hull	4·07	76	18·7	24	5·9
East Yorkshire	2·40	63	26·3	10	4·2
Grimsby	3·05	70	22·9	18	5·9
Scunthorpe	1·91	48	25·1	10	5·2
Northallerton	1·31	36	27·5	10	7·7
York	3·23	82	25·4	10	3·1
Scarborough	1·83	45	24·6	10	5·6
Harrogate	1·70	43	25·3	13	7·7
Bradford	5·95	176	29·6	32	5·4
Airedale	2·18	65	29·8	14	6·4
Calderdale	2·47	78	31·6	18	7·3
Huddersfield	2·76	62	22·5	18	6·5
Dewsbury	2·59	60	23·1	18	6·9
Leeds Western	4·62	112	24·2	16	3·5
Leeds Eastern	5·04	119	23·6	30	6·0
Wakefield	2·08	58	27·9	14	6·7
Pontefract	2·43	60	24·7	15	6·2
Trent RHA	57·69	1,344	23·3	302	5·2
North Derbyshire	2·83	86	30·4	16	5·7
Southern Derbyshire	5·07	94	18·5	24	4·7
Leicestershire	10·62	250	23·5	41	3·9
North Lincolnshire	2·83	62	21·9	15	5·3
South Lincolnshire	3·20	83	26·0	23	7·2
Bassetlaw	1·10	30	27·2	8	7·3
Central Nottinghamshire	3·44	86	25·0	23	6·7
Nottingham	10·87	251	23·1	45	4·1
Barnsley	2·56	52	20·3	13	5·1
Doncaster	4·44	101	22·7	24	5·4
Rotherham	3·18	67	21·1	15	4·7
Sheffield	7·56	182	24·1	55	7·3
East Anglian RHA	26·40	613	23·2	132	5·0
Cambridge	4·16	94	22·6	24	5·8
Peterborough	3·44	92	26·8	18	5·2
West Suffolk	3·02	87	28·8	12	4·0
East Suffolk	3·83	95	24·8	20	5·2
Norwich	5·10	91	17·9	22	4·3
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	2·31	54	23·4	16	6·9
West Norfolk and Wisbech	2·28	59	25·9	12	5·3
Huntingdon	2·27	40	17·6	8	3·6
North West Thames RHA	40·07	846	21·1	249	6·2
North Bedfordshire	2·34	45	19·2	14	6·0
South Bedfordshire	4·54	93	20·5	26	5·7
North Hertfordshire	3·10	66	21·3	13	4·2
East Hertfordshire	2·36	53	22·4	14	6·0
North West Hertfordshire	2·32	42	18·1	12	5·2
South West Hertfordshire	3·15	48	15·2	20	6·4
Barnet	3·07	73	23·8	26	8·5
Harrow	3·13	75	24·0	24	7·7
Hillingdon	3·08	51	16·6	22	7·1
Hounslow and Spelthorne	4·04	92	22·8	23	5·7
Ealing	2·14	55	25·7	10	4·7
Riverside	2·04	54	26·4	15	7·3
Parkside	4·75	98	20·6	30	6·3
North East Thames RHA	57·13	1,241	21·7	291	5·1
Basildon and Thurrock	4·47	116	26·0	21	4·7
Mid Essex	3·85	75	19·5	21	5·6

Regional/District Health Authority	Live births (thousands)	Total maternity beds: Average daily number	Total maternity beds: Number per 1,000 births	Special care baby cots not in maternity wards: Average daily number	Special care baby cots not in maternity wards: Number per 1,000 births
North East Essex	3·78	75	19·8	18	4·8
West Essex	3·03	76	25·1	16	5·3
Southend	3·90	85	21·8	16	4·1
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	4·86	107	22·0	27	5·5
Hampstead	2·34	64	27·4	18	7·7
Bloomsbury	3·28	78	23·8	23	7·0
Islington	2·76	70	25·4	20	7·3
City and Hackney	3·76	75	19·9	21	5·6
Newham	3·96	68	17·2	18	4·6
Tower Hamlets	3·38	77	22·8	12	3·6
Enfield	3·51	74	21·1	10	2·8
Haringey	2·86	69	24·2	18	6·3
Redbridge	3·20	72	22·5	18	5·6
Waltham Forest	4·20	61	14·5	14	3·3
South East Thames RHA	50·23	1,070	21·3	278	5·5
Brighton	3·69	49	13·3	24	6·5
Eastbourne	1·75	52	29·8	12	6·9
Hastings	1·78	35	19·7	12	6·7
South East Kent	3·38	79	23·4	19	5·6
Canterbury and Thanet	3·74	94	25·1	22	5·9
Dartford and Gravesham	3·21	77	24·0	14	4·4
Maidstone	2·51	47	18·7	10	4·0
Medway	4·61	79	17·1	20	4·3
Tunbridge Wells	2·84	60	21·1	17	6·0
Bexley	3·54	81	22·9	14	4·0
Greenwich	3·37	69	20·5	20	5·9
Bromley	3·50	78	22·3	15	4·3
West Lambeth	3·43	89	25·9	20	5·8
Camberwell	4·04	88	21·8	21	5·2
Lewisham and North Southwark	4·86	92	18·9	38	7·8
South West Thames RHA	34·78	705	20·3	189	5·4
North West Surrey	2·83	75	26·5	15	5·5
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	2·36	54	22·9	12	5·1
South West Surrey	2·13	44	20·6	14	6·6
Mid Surrey	1·90	50	26·3	14	7·4
East Surrey	2·32	39	16·8	11	4·7
Chichester	2·11	43	20·4	10	4·7
Mid Downs	3·83	59	15·4	19	5·0
Worthing	2·47	37	15·0	9	3·6
Croydon	4·19	64	15·3	20	4·8
Kingston and Esher	2·38	63	26·4	13	5·4
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	1·57	31	19·8	8	5·1
Wandsworth	3·35	75	22·4	19	5·7
Merton and Sutton	3·34	69	20·7	25	7·5
Wessex RHA	37·09	1,032	27·8	183	4·9
East Dorset	4·65	206	44·3	28	6·0
West Dorset	1·96	56	28·5	15	7·5
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6·92	196	28·3	25	3·6
Southampton and South West Hampshire	5·94	141	23·7	22	3·7
Winchester	2·73	57	20·9	16	5·9
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	2·54	46	18·1	14	5·5
Salisbury	2·16	55	25·4	14	6·5
Swindon	3·72	95	25·5	19	5·1
Bath	5·14	145	28·2	21	4·1
Isle of Wight	1·32	36	27·2	9	6·8
Oxford RHA	34·18	691	20·2	183	5·3
East Berkshire	4·92	106	21·6	27	5·5
West Berkshire	5·41	96	17·7	28	5·2
Aylesbury Vale	2·12	49	23·2	13	6·1
Wycombe	3·13	54	17·3	16	5·2
Milton Keynes	3·14	59	18·8	21	6·7
Kettering	3·41	54	15·8	16	4·7
Northampton	4·21	66	15·7	27	6·4
Oxfordshire	7·84	207	26·4	35	4·4
South Western RHA	40·25	902	22·4	168	4·2

Regional/District Health Authority	Total maternity beds: Live births (thousands)	Total maternity beds: Average daily number	Total maternity beds: Number per 1,000 births	Special care baby cots not in maternity wards: Average daily number	Special care baby cots not in maternity wards: Number per 1,000 births
Bristol and Weston	5·55	121	21·8	32	5·8
Southmead	5·88	106	18·0	30	5·1
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4·33	109	25·2	20	4·6
Exeter	3·71	80	21·6	27	7·3
North Devon	1·71	39	22·8	2	1·2
Plymouth	5·45	121	22·2	24	4·4
Torbay	2·40	57	23·8	1	0·4
Cheltenham	2·42	55	22·7	12	5·0
Gloucester	3·93	88	22·4	20	5·1
Somerset	4·87	127	26·1	0	0·0
West Midlands RHA	74·35	1,626	21·9	387	5·2
Bromsgrove and Redditch	2·88	50	17·4	12	4·2
Herefordshire	1·95	35	17·9	12	6·1
Kidderminster and District	0·35	24	68·8	0	0·0
Worcester and District	2·79	63	22·6	12	4·3
Shropshire	5·33	137	25·7	22	4·1
Mid Staffordshire	2·57	60	23·3	12	4·7
North Staffordshire	6·71	165	24·6	30	4·5
South East Staffordshire	3·18	55	17·3	15	4·7
Rugby	1·08	24	22·2	8	7·4
North Warwickshire	2·94	71	24·1	20	6·8
South Warwickshire	2·16	53	24·6	15	6·9
Central Birmingham	4·62	109	23·6	30	6·5
North Birmingham	3·61	88	24·4	22	6·1
South Birmingham	2·64	54	20·5	14	5·1
West Birmingham	4·20	76	18·1	23	5·5
Coventry	4·93	119	24·1	29	5·9
Dudley	4·33	92	21·3	18	4·2
Sandwell	3·19	64	20·1	14	4·4
Solihull	6·59	109	16·6	38	5·8
Walsall	3·39	66	19·5	21	6·1
Wolverhampton	4·93	111	22·5	20	4·1
Mersey RHA	32·18	711	22·1	172	5·3
Chester	4·14	89	21·5	20	4·8
Crewe	2·92	53	18·1	15	5·1
Macclesfield	1·36	24	17·7	10	7·4
Warrington	3·11	60	19·3	15	4·8
Liverpool	7·14	164	23·0	37	5·2
St. Helens and Knowsley	3·60	99	27·5	20	5·6
Southport and Formby	1·29	35	27·1	11	8·5
South Sefton	4·09	84	20·5	20	4·9
Wirral	4·52	102	22·6	24	5·3
North Western RHA	58·04	1,454	25·1	334	5·8
Lancaster	1·91	48	25·1	16	8·4
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	3·54	93	26·3	18	5·1
Preston	4·55	89	19·6	20	4·4
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	3·82	115	30·1	20	5·2
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2·97	65	21·9	17	5·7
West Lancashire	1·32	34	25·7	9	6·8
Chorley and South Ribble	0·24	25	105·9	0	0·0
Bolton	4·28	104	24·3	21	4·9
Bury	2·50	68	27·2	16	6·4
North Manchester	2·64	60	22·7	18	6·8
Central Manchester	3·99	114	28·6	41	10·3
South Manchester	4·78	119	24·9	28	5·9
Oldham	3·25	85	26·2	16	5·0
Rochdale	2·26	52	23·0	15	6·6
Salford	3·67	79	21·5	18	4·9
Stockport	4·13	94	22·7	20	4·9
Tameside and Glossop	3·21	82	25·5	19	5·9
Trafford	1·17	38	32·4	8	6·8
Wigan	3·81	88	23·1	14	3·7

Sickle-cell Disease

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority, and by district health authority, the facilities provided for *(a)* sickle-cell counselling, *(b)* sickle-cell opportunist screening, *(c)* sickle-cell ante-natal screening and *(d)* sickle-cell post-natal screening.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Menopause

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to undertake a national survey to determine the numbers of women who suffer unpleasant symptoms during the menopause; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. It is the experience of clinicians working in this field that about a quarter of women will have no menopausal symptoms, about half will have some symptoms, and the remainder will have symptoms severe enough to require medical treatment.

Birth Statistics

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for 1990 for the residents of *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS region and district within England (i) the number of live births, (ii) the percentage of live births with unstated birthweight, (iii) the number of live births with stated birthweight and (iv) the percentages of these which were under 1000g, 1000g to 1499g, 1500g to 1999g, 2000g to 2499g, 2500g to 2999g, 3000g to 3499g, 3500g to 3999g and 4000g and above.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Brook Hospital

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings Ministers have had with local campaigners concerning the Brook hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: I met my hon. Friend and local campaigners on 14 February.

Mentally Handicapped People

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to local authorities in respect of services they provide for people with a mental handicap and the role of specialist mental handicap nurses in the provision of such services.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department recently issued for consultation a draft circular giving specific guidance to local authorities on services for people with learning disabilities (mental handicap) together with a parallel draft health circular on the role of the NHS in providing health care for this client group. There is a long-term requirement for trained mental handicap nurses and we are currently considering with professional and other interests how nurses' skills and experience can best be made available in the new pattern of services.

Elderly People

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether under the terms of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, elderly people will be *(a)* given the opportunity to contribute to and comment on any care plan drawn up for them, *(b)* entitled to the help of an advocate if so desired to comment and contribute to any care plan drawn up for them and *(c)* offered a choice of services within the care plan.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In both the policy guidance and the forthcoming practice guidance on care management and assessment, strong emphasis is given to enabling potential users of services of all ages to participate in the assessment process and to contribute to their care plan, with any points of difference between the assessor and the user being recorded. Local authorities will also be encouraged in the practice guidance to encourage advocacy support where people are unable to speak for themselves and have no other friend or relative to speak on their behalf.

The promotion of choice and independence underlies the whole community care reform programme. The assessment and care management process will encourage choice, with assessors providing information on services available across both the statutory and independent sectors.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the estimated cost of inoculating all children of school age against the hepatitis B virus.

Mr. Dorrell: No accurate assessment exists of the cost of this proposal.

NHS Facilities (Gedling)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional medical facilities in the national health service have been made available to the residents of the Gedling constituency during the last 10 years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. D. H. White, chairman of the Nottingham health authority, for details.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Government's response to the report of the Health Select Committee on waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's response to the first report of the Select Committee on Health (Session 1990-91) ("Public Expenditure on Health Services: Waiting Lists") (HC 429) is being laid before the House today as Cm. 1586. Copies are available in the Vote Office. It will be published by HMSO in due course.

Medical Services Committees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will issue a circular to family health services authorities advising them of the importance of seeking the views of local medical committees prior to appointing medical services committees; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the proportion of overseas qualified doctors on medical services committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1974 (S.I. 1974 No. 455) provide that local medical committees shall appoint the medical members of medical service committees and that if dissatisfied with the appointment of the lay chairman, they may require the family health services authority to refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Information is not available centrally on the representation on medical service

committees of doctors qualified overseas. Guidance on the constitution of service committees and the appointment of members was included in letters FPCL190/90 and FPCL(W)83/90 issued to health authorities in September 1990. Copies of the letters have been placed in the Library.

Doctors (EC Employment)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the arrangements within the European Community relating to the employment within the Community of overseas qualified doctors who have the status of British citizens and who are fully registered medical practitioners in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We are aware of the difficulties that British citizens who are fully registered and hold overseas qualifications may experience in gaining access to employment in other member states. The European Commission has only recently provided information on each member state's arrangements for recognising overseas qualifications and we have not properly assessed them yet. The arrangements are currently being discussed in Brussels as part of an initiative by the Commission to examine the difficulties associated with recognition of overseas qualifications. We are represented at the discussions.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make representations in the EC Council of Ministers for the equal treatment in Community law of all British citizens who are fully registered medical practitioners in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: All British citizens have the right to establish themselves in any country of the Community. The main difference in the treatment of British citizens which relates to my responsibilities concerns medical practitioners who are fully registered but hold non-EC qualifications and the recognition of these qualifications by other member states. We are aware that Community citizens holding qualifications obtained outside the Community which are recognised in one state may experience difficulty in persuading other member states to accept them. However, the European Commission has begun an assessment of member states' arrangements for recognition of non-EC qualifications held by EC nationals. We are involved in the current discussions between member states on this complex issue.

Special Diets

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that children and other patients who are required to follow a dairy and egg-free diet should be able to obtain the products they require under prescription; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not the function of the NHS to provide food products on prescription. We recognise that in some cases GPs may consider their active intervention is necessary to help patients keep to medically recommended diets. In such cases, GPs may prescribe from a range of specially manufactured food products recommended by the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances. These include products designed for the treatment of patients with lactose intolerance or whole protein intolerance and patients who have to follow a low protein diet.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the MENCAP report on day services, a copy of which has been sent to the Minister responsible for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department recently issued for consultation a draft circular on social care for people with learning disabilities supported by an annex giving draft guidance on the development of day services. Mencap was consulted during the preparation of these documents, and we shall take account of its latest report, and any additional documents from Mencap and others with an interest, when preparing the final version of the guidance.

Blood Products

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give figures for the charges made for the collection of blood and blood products by each regional transfusion centre;

(2) what guidance has been issued on the pricing of blood products.

Mr. Dorrell: No charge is made for blood which is freely donated by our volunteer donors. From 1 April it is our policy that regional transfusion centres (RTCs) should recover the cost of collecting, processing and transporting blood by levying handling charges on the user hospitals. Within this general policy it is for the regional transfusion centres, following consultation with the users to determine an appropriate structure for handling charges to recover their operating costs. Information about these individual arrangements is not held centrally.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of the national blood transfusion service.

Mr. Dorrell: We greatly appreciate the efforts of the national blood transfusion service (NBTS) and the altruism of our voluntary and unpaid donors for maintaining adequate blood supplies in this country. The last major change in the national blood transfusion service was the establishment in 1989 of the national directorate to co-ordinate the activities of the regional transfusion centres in relation to national policies and strategies for the blood supply. Organisation of the national blood transfusion service is kept under review.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Ambulance Council working party on the problems of lay serving ambulance staff; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have accepted the recommendations made by a working party set up by the Department to consider the problems of long-serving ambulance men and women and officials will be writing shortly to interested parties about implementation.

Heart Pacemakers

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the practice of charging bereaved relatives of patients who have died a fee for the removal, by a doctor at the hospital, of a heart pacemaker prior to cremation is customary throughout the United Kingdom;

(2) what provision exists under the national health service for the removal of pacemakers from the bodies of patients who have died while in hospital;

(3) under what authority doctors at Sandwell general hospital, West Bromwich, charge bereaved relatives a fixed fee for the removal of pacemakers from the bodies of patients who have died at the hospital.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 18 June 1991]:* Central guidance on the removal of pacemakers from people who have died in hospital was issued in 1983 through Health Notice (83)6, a copy of which is available in the Library. The intention is that the health authority should meet the cost and that in no circumstances should bereaved relatives be charged. I understand that Sandwell health authority has reimbursed the relatives who were charged, and has apologised to them for the unnecessary distress caused by its action.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reason his Department is not paying severe disability premium to Mr. D. Wilkes of Perry Barr, Birmingham, awarded by the social security appeal tribunal on 8 January 1991, Ref. 401: 33475.

Miss Widdecombe: The severe disability premium is not being paid to Mr. Wilkes because the chief adjudication officer is appealing to the social security commissioner against the social security appeal tribunal's decision. Under regulation 37 of the Social Security (Claims and Payment) Regulations 1987 the award is not implemented pending the outcome of this appeal.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reason his Department is not paying disability premium from 11 April 1988 to Miss M. Hunt of Perry Barr, Birmingham, awarded by the social security appeal tribunal on 8 January 1991, Ref. 401: 33209.

Miss Widdecombe: The severe disability premium is not being paid to Miss Hunt because the chief adjudication officer is appealing to the social security commissioner against the social security appeal tribunal's decision. Under regulation 37 of the Social Security (Claims and Payment) Regulations 1987 the award is not being implemented pending the outcome of this appeal.

Benefit Cheques

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to change the arrangements so that claimants can more easily cash benefit girocheques for more than £75.

Miss Widdecombe: The arrangements for encashment of girocheques are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensioners

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the financial amount deducted from pensioners in hospital longer than six weeks, for the last year for which figures are available; and what steps he is prepared to take to review this policy.

Miss Widdecombe: Most social security benefits, including retirement pensions and invalidity pensions, are reduced after the beneficiary has been in hospital for more than six weeks. The current reductions are £10·40 a week for those with dependants and £20·80 a week for those without dependants. A further reduction is made after the beneficiary has been in hospital for more than 52 weeks. At that stage, the benefit of those with dependants is reduced by a further £10·40, making £20·80 in all, and the benefit of those without dependants is reduced to the personal requirements rate of £10·40.

These provisions are based on the view that state funds should not make double provision for the same needs. As the national health service provides free maintenance as well as free treatment, maintenance benefits, also paid out of state funds, should not be paid in full indefinitely.

The policy on benefits paid to hospital in-patients was reviewed in 1987 as part of the social security review and we have no current plans to conduct a further review.

Child Benefit

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for 1981 and for the latest available date through child benefit payments the numbers of *(a)* children and *(b)* children in lone parent households in Greenwich, Wandsworth and Lewisham.

Mr. Jack: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that information relating to child benefit is available only on a national basis and cannot be given for particular areas.

Non-Public Information

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the titles of guidance and procedural manuals produced for his Department's offices, other than local offices, which are not available to the public, and *(b)* in each case the reason for them not being available publicly.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department produces a large number of formal and informal guidance and procedural documents for its staff on a wide range of subjects. This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Philippines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to the people of the Philippines following the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made grants totalling almost £100,000 to two United Kingdom-based voluntary agencies. Our embassy is discussing with the Government of the Philippines their appeal of 27 June to identify what further help we can give locally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Animal Welfare

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking at the intergovernmental conference on political union to protect the welfare of animals.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The United Kingdom has proposed that the conference makes a declaration, noting that Community legislation on a wide range of subjects can affect the welfare of animals and calling on the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament to ensure that the Community, when taking any action which affects animals, pays full regard to their welfare requirements and their status as sentient beings.

Croatia and Slovenia

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government support the endeavours of Croatia and Slovenia to seek independence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our western partners have consistently made clear our preference for a single Yugoslav political entity, and have called on all Yugoslav republics to avoid unilateral actions which may jeopardise negotiations to secure a new basis for Yugoslav unity. But this cannot be brought about by force. We are opposed to intimidation or coercion of democratically elected Governments in Slovenia and Croatia, as elsewhere.

Albania

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will establish a United Kingdom mission in Albania; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no plans to establish a resident British mission in Albania.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the provision of know-how or similar funding for Albania.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no plans to extend the know-how fund to Albania.

Philippines

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what services are provided by Thomas Cook (Philippines) Inc. to the British embassy in Manila; whether these arrangements involve payments by United Kingdom citizens to Thomas Cook (Philippines) Inc. in respect of visa applications; whether any Filipino citizens applying for entry visas to the United Kingdom have been advised by the embassy to seek the assistance of Thomas Cook (Philippines) Inc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British embassy in Manila has no official agreement with Thomas Cook (Philippines) Inc. to provide services either for officially funded travel or as a conduit for visa applications.

Thomas Cook is one of over 300 travel and shipping agents permitted to lodge visa applications at the embassy. Any charge they make for their services is a matter for the company and not the British Government.

Inquiries are occasionally received asking whether attendance in person is necessary to obtain a visa. Frequent travellers are advised that their applications can be submitted through a recognised travel agent, but the British embassy does not encourage the specific use of Thomas Cook or any other individual travel agent.

Weapons (Iraq)

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts the United Kingdom is making to deal with Iraq's remaining nuclear, chemical, biological weapon and missile capabilities.

Mr. Hurd: We took a prominent part in the establishment under Security Council resolution 687 of the special commission to ensure that Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missile capabilities are destroyed.

We continue to take an active role in supporting the special commission's work. We have made available: a senior British expert on chemical and biological defence matters to serve as a full-time member of the commission; three British experts for the first chemical weapons inspection in Iraq; an RAF explosives expert as adviser to the first ballistic missile inspection; one United Kingdom expert for the second IAEA inspection and two or more to take part in the third inspection. We have offered up to six inspectors to take part in the first biological weapons inspection and we intend to reinforce our embassy in Bahrain to liaise with the special commission's field office there.

We have also provided information on Iraq's weapons capabilities as well as minor items of equipment and RAF transport facilities, plus eight Land-Rovers and trailers. Further specialised equipment and support will be provided at an initial cost of up to £1 million, as stated in the answer of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' on 19 June to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). The facilities at the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down will be used to analyse samples taken by the inspection teams.

We shall continue to support the special commission in carrying out its mandate, and encourage others to do likewise. It is important that Iraq should not be allowed to retain or redevelop these weapons of mass destruction.

Kuwait

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens have been assisted by the British embassy in Kuwait since it reopened to return to the United Kingdom for medical treatment following injuries sustained in clearing mines or other war-related explosives.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 24 June 1991]:* None.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Offshore Islands

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many offshore islands are inhabited and what their population is.

Mr. Hanley: The latest available information is from the 1991 census of population taken on 21 April. The results are being collated for inclusion in a preliminary report to be published around the end of July. I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library when the information is available.

Public Order Offences

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the prosecutions under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 for incitement to *(a)* religious and *(b)* racial hatred, indicating the outcome in each case.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 26 June 1991]:* I understand that no persons have been prosecuted under part III of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Bale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be the cost in 1991-92 of increasing the basic retirement pension by £5 per week for a single pensioner and £8 a week for a married couple, assuming similar increases in linked benefits and in income-related benefits for pensioners, giving figures *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of tax revenues and savings in other benefits.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* The gross cost in Northern Ireland of increasing the weekly basic retirement pension by £5 a week for a single pensioner and £8 a week for a married couple, assuming similar increases in linked benefits and in income-related benefits for all those receiving these increases, is £69·3 million. Net of income tax, the figure would be £64·8 million. A reliable estimate is not available of the cost, if those in receipt of a linked benefit but not the pensioner premium, did not receive a similar increase in their income-related benefit.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the clearing house arrangements under the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Fallon: As part of a package of measures to contain the costs of the assisted places scheme within the resources available, my right hon. and learned Friend has reluctantly decided that the proposed scheme for the redistribution of vacant places under clearing house arrangements, notified to schools earlier, cannot go ahead this year. The Government remain committed to the assisted places scheme and some 27,000 children are expected to have places under the scheme in the coming year.

Braille Exam Papers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funds he makes available to examining boards to produce examination papers in Braille.

Mr. Eggar: None. The examining bodies cover the cost of producing papers in Braille by making a small addition to the examination entry fees of all candidates—whose fees are met, in the case of candidates from maintained schools, by the local education authorities.

South Park School, Lincoln

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the procedures by which he will decide whether to approve an application by Lincolnshire county council to reopen for educational purposes the former South Park school in Lincoln.

Mr. Fallon: If Lincolnshire county council wishes to establish a new school in the premises of the former South Park school, it will have to publish proposals under section 12 of the Education Act 1980. In considering whether to approve such proposals, my right hon. and learned Friend would take account of all relevant factors, including any objections to the proposals.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out his reasons for turning down the proposal to establish a voluntary-aided city technology college on the site of the former South Park school, Lincoln.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has never been asked formally to consider a proposal to establish a voluntary aided school with city technology college characteristics in Lincoln.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek a report from Lincolnshire county council on the possible future use of the school playing fields adjacent to the site of the former South Park school, Lincoln; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The disposal of surplus local authority land is a matter for the local authority concerned and the Secretary of State for the Environment. A planning policy guidance note on sport and recreation already issued in draft for consultation asks local authorities to review longer-term educational and community need before deciding on disposal of school playing fields.

Student Costs

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil at primary and secondary schools in Cornwall and per student in further education colleges in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures in 1978-79 at constant prices.

Mr. Fallon: In 1988-89, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available, net institutional expenditure per pupil in Cornwall was £1,010 in nursery and primary schools, £1,525 in secondary schools and £3,615 per student in further education. In

1978-79 net institutional expenditure per pupil in Cornwall was £325 in nursery and primary schools and £490 in secondary schools. At 1988-89 prices this represents some £710 and £1,085 respectively. Figures for net institutional expenditure per further education student in 1978-79 are not available.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the allocation of ministerial responsibilities within his Department; if he has any plans to review these; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have no plans to review the allocation of ministerial responsibilities in my Department. The present allocation works well.

Local Authority Members

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has relating to the average number of hours per week devoted to public duties by members of Scottish local authorities; what plans he has to seek evidence of this; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Research commissioned by the Widdicombe committee of inquiry into the conduct of local authority business was based on average hours per month rather than per week. This indicated that in 1976 and in 1985 regional and islands councillors spent on average 129 hours per month on council duties. The equivalent figures for district councillors were 92 hours per month in 1976 and 93 hours per month in 1985.

My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to update that research.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has plans to review the allowances or expenses paid to local authority councillors in Scotland for *(a)* remuneration, *(b)* recompense for lost salaries or wages, *(c)* subsistence allowance and *(d)* travelling expenses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: A new system of remuneration for councillors came into effect on 1 April 1991. Under the new arrangements, financial loss allowance is no longer available for councillors. The system will be reviewed after it has been in operation for about a year. In the interim my right hon. Friend intends to make regulations for Scotland which will counter abuse of the special responsibility allowance element of the new scheme which has been drawn to his attention.

The arrangements for travel and subsistence allowances are unchanged. Rates of all allowances will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis.

Local Government Services

Mr. McMaster To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to subject any further local government services to compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government are looking at ways of extending the range of local authority services subject to compulsory competitive tendering. Consultants have been appointed to examine and report on the technical feasibility of extending the legislative requirements for competitive tendering to the provision of professional services. Local government will be consulted about any proposals which emerge.

Johnstone Health Clinic

Mr. McMaster To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the development of the Johnstone health clinic.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have nothing to add at this time to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 13 February at column *454-55*.

Political Advisers

Mr. McMaster To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names of each political adviser working in the Scottish Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: One special adviser is employed in the Scottish Office, Mr. Alan Young.

Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures have been taken to enhance security at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley in the last six months; what further proposals will be implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The measures taken recently have been

- Security sub-committee established in January
- Report produced in February on improvements to be carried out
- Access to service corridors restricted from February
- All Staff sent a memorandum in February
- Meetings with Strathclyde police on crime prevention in May
- Each induction programme for new staff includes security session with local police
- Discussions with firm of security consultants during May
- Extra digital locks fitted to a number of internal and external doors
- Video cameras recording 24-hour period in respect of car park
- Full-time car park attendant appointed
- An extra portering round during evenings

Further measures in the process of being implemented are

- Staff identification system to be introduced in July
- Alarms for all doors leading to fire escapes to be fitted
- Locks for additional external doors
- Formal instruction to staff that misuse of fire doors is a disciplinary offence
- Further exhortation to staff to be vigilant at all times

These measures build on a range of security improvements which the local management has initiated over the past two years. The position is being kept under constant review and further steps will be taken if appropriate. The health board has assured me that all practical measures are being taken to ensure the security of patients, visitors and staff without being excessively restrictive.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to review the annuality principle applied to local government finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was raised by local authorities in Scotland in 1990-91 using their discretionary powers to raise £5 per head of adult population, in areas where there is a single tier of principal local authority, and £2·50 per head of adult population, in areas where there are two administrative tiers; and if he has made any assumptions for the likely yield under this power for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* In terms of section 83 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended by schedule 1 to the Abolition of Domestic Rates, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, Scottish local authorities have a discretionary power to incur expenditure not exceeding the product of a 2p rate based on 1988-89 rate poundage.

Information about the extent of such expenditure is not held centrally.

Elderslie Hospital

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has held with Argyll and Clyde health board concerning the development of Elderslie hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Argyll and Clyde health board has submitted to my Department proposals which will enable the young handicapped patients residing in Elderslie hospital to live as normal a life as possible in a community environment. On 12 June I announced that the sum of £12·4 million is to be made available to Scotland's health boards in bridging finance to develop and expand care in the community in conjunction with local authorities. Argyll and Clyde health board have been allocated £764,000 over a three-year period to enable them to implement immediately their plans for fully supported community units for the young residents of Elderslie.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes in the incidence of unemployment have taken place in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* the Greenock travel-to-work area in each of the past 30 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is available on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information if necessary.

HIV Tests

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the cost to the Scottish Office of financing the HIV ante-natal named testing study in Edinburgh and Dundee from 31 August 1990 to 31 March 1991; and what efforts were made to secure alternative funding for the study from 31 March 1991;

(2) if he will set out the reasons for ceasing to fund the HIV ante-natal named screening study in Edinburgh and Dundee on 31 March;

(3) if he will set out the Government's policy towards HIV named testing studies of the sort carried out in Edinburgh and Dundee ante-natal units.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This study began in December 1988 and received financial support from the Medical Research Council up to 31 August 1990. The Scottish Office provided £55,000 to support the study for a further seven months up to the end of March 1991 in order to maximise the benefits of the information which had been collected and to enable a reliable assessment to be made of HIV prevalence among pregnant women in Edinburgh and Dundee. The information collected in the study is now being analysed and a report is expected to be published in the autumn.

There are no plans for further named surveys of this kind to be conducted in Scotland, but I understand that the Medical Research Council has agreed to fund a further study in Edinburgh and Dundee, involving anonymised testing both of women attending ante-natal clinics and of women having termination of pregnancy. This study is expected to begin in September.

Agency Status

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those bodies currently with agency status within his Department under the "next steps" initiative; and whether he has identified any further candidates for agency status under the initiative within his Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 June 1991]:* Three executive agencies have so far been established under the next steps initiative from within my responsibilities: the Registers of Scotland, Historic Scotland and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency. I announced the candidature of the agricultural scientific services of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department for agency status on Tuesday 16 April 1991 and further candidates will be brought forward in due course.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abortions were performed in Scotland in the first 12 months of operation of the Abortion Act 1967 and in the latest year for which figures are available; and under what statutory grounds these abortions were performed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* The information requested on terminations under the Abortion Act 1967 is as follows:

	1 April 1968 to 31 March 1969	*1990 (calendar year)*
Risk to life of woman	110	36
Risk of injury to health of woman	1,892	9,962
Risk to health of existing children	126	95
Risk of abnormality of foetus	110	99
Emergency to save life of woman	3	—
Emergency to prevent injury to health of woman	3	—
Total	2,244	10,192

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* My Department has proposals to mount television information campaigns in 1991-92 on road safety and crime prevention. Planned campaigns costing £100,000 or more are proposed on fire prevention, children's hearings and right to buy. Detailed campaign planning, including media to be used, has yet to be decided on these topics.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Knacker Industry

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to draw up a code of practice to ensure the continuity of derogations from EEC regulations in respect of the knacker industry.

Mr. Maclean: A derogation in the directive on the disposal of animal waste (90/667 EEC), which we fought hard to achieve, permits the knacker industry to continue to sell petfood, at least until the end of 1995. In the meantime, proposals will be considered by the European Community by the end of 1992 in relation to the controls which might secure the longer-term future of this trade. Our officials are, therefore, currently reviewing with the knacker trade existing control measures.

EC Grants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make representations in the EC Council of Ministers to remove the bar on payment of EC grants to farmers following late claims, and to replace the present rule with a discretion exercisable by himself; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have every sympathy with the efforts of the hon. Member on behalf of his constituents. He will be aware that we make every effort to ensure that our administration of EC schemes is sensitive to farmers' practical concerns, consistent with effectively addressing the risk of fraud. It is, however, important that there is comparability of treatment between producers in different member states and strictly applied Community-wide rules regarding claims received after the closing dates for the suckler cow premium scheme and the sheep annual premium scheme are necessary to ensure this. Giving a general discretion to the various national authorities responsible for administering these schemes to accept or reject late claims would undermine this important principle.

Dioxins

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will revert to the previously established lower safety level for dioxin.

Mr. Maclean: No safety limit was set prior to the work recently carried out for the World Health Organisation which established a provisional tolerable daily intake of dioxins.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the number of municipal and private incinerators where he has conducted tests for dioxins in England on *(a)* agricultural land or *(b)* products; what proportions these are of the total number of incinerators in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Dioxin levels have been measured in milk collected from farms in the vicinity of two of the four high-temperature chemical waste incinerators situated in England and Wales. The preliminary results fall within the range of background levels found in other industrial areas.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set up a public inquiry into the dioxin levels in milk in the Bolsover area.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 1 July 1991.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the maximum tolerable concentration of dioxins in nanogrammes per kilogramme of milk prior to its level being set at 0·7 nanogrammes.

Mr. Gummer: No prior figure was set.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) of 26 June, if he will list the names and positions of the scientific and medical experts which calculated the maximum tolerable concentration of dioxins in milk; whether they were members of any Government advisory committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The chairman of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) was consulted about the calculation of the maximum tolerable concentration of dioxins in milk and agreed the tolerance level set. The full set of results from the dioxins survey will be considered by the COT before publication later this year. In order to deal quickly with the enhanced levels of dioxins found in the milk from two farms in Derbyshire an expert scientific and medical team from my Department and the Department of Health was assembled to make the detailed calculations which were based on recommendations made in December 1990 by a WHO expert group.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will pay compensation to those who have had their livelihood adversely affected as a result of the dioxin levels in the milk supply in the Bolsover area.

Mr. Maclean: I have every sympathy with the two farmers whose milk can no longer go for human consumption and my staff are giving all the help they can. As for compensation, the established principle which applies in such circumstances is that it is the polluter who should pay.

DEFENCE

Racial Harassment

11. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints in respect of racial abuse or harassment have been made against military personnel in each of the past three years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We do not maintain central records of all complaints of racial abuse or harassment. The MOD is aware, however, of four complaints in both 1988 and 1989, three in 1990 and one in 1991, so far.

Low Flying

12. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to appoint a liaison officer to deal with concerns and complaints from communities in the highlands and islands on the subject of low-flying military aircraft.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department plans to establish three RAF regional community relations officers in southern Scotland and the Borders, the Lake District and in Wales on a trial basis. If the scheme is successful, we will consider whether to extend it to other areas.

Territorial Army

13. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if advertising for volunteers to join the Territorial Army has been discontinued.

Mr. Tom King: No.

Scottish Units

14. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the record of recruitment and retention of service personnel in units based in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Recruitment in Scotland to all the services in 1989-90, the last full year for which data are available, was 11·6 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. The only relevant data on retention relate to the Scottish division, where the rate is marginally below that for the Army as a whole.

Rosyth

15. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has held with the local authorities concerned about the economic consequences of the closure of the Rosyth royal naval base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have received a number of representations from the local authorities. I met representatives of Fife regional council, Dunfermline district council and the trade unions earlier this year.

16. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to visit Rosyth naval dockyard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Defence Industry

17. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account he has taken in his consideration of "Options for Change" of the continuing need for a British defence manufacturing capability.

Mr. Alan Clark: Industrial considerations are among the factors being taken into account.

Naval Bases

19. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the options he is considering concerning the future of the royal naval bases to allow full consultation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We will consult the trade unions in the usual way once we have proposals to make, but we are not yet in that position.

Trident

20. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress of the Trident programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Trident programme continues to progress to time and within budget towards its in-service date of the mid-1990s.

Kurdish Refugees

21. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timetable for withdrawal of British troops from duties of protecting Kurdish refugees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Soviet Forces (Nuclear Warheads)

22. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear warheads the Soviet armed forces have at their disposal.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet armed forces are estimated to have in excess of 25,000 nuclear warheads at their disposal.

Surplus Land

23. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review Ministry of Defence landholdings with a view to returning surplus land to community use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is this Government's policy that the defence estate should be no larger than necessary for defence purposes; we continually seek opportunities for rationalisation and the release of land surplus to our requirements. In order to ensure the best return is achieved for the taxpayer it is our normal practice to offer surplus land for sale on the open market.

Helicopters

24. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the extended use of military helicopters for civilian duties including use as air ambulances.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of representations have been received.

RAF Bentwaters and Woodbridge

25. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 17 May the United States Air Force announced its intention to withdraw from RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge by September 1993. The Ministry of Defence is examining options for the possible future use of the stations. No decisions have yet been taken.

The Gulf

26. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish an account of the operational record of the Royal Air Force in the Gulf conflict; and what information he has on what such reports are being published by other allied participating countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine's dispatch on Operation Granby was published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office as a supplement to the *London Gazette* on 29 June. I have no information on whether other coalition countries will be publishing official reports of their role in the conflict.

German Minister of Defence

27. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his German counterpart; and what aspects of future defence arrangements were discussed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend last met Dr. Stoltenberg at the Eurogroup conference held in Washington on 24 and 25 June, which considered various themes concerning the future of the NATO alliance under the headings: "New Security Challenges and the Future Role of the Alliance", "Future Force Structures and the Arms Control Process" and "NATO's Strategy: Political Guidance, Alliance Policy and Concepts".

Regiments

28. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which regiments will be disbanded under the Government's latest proposals.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 4 June, consultations are taking place within the Army on its future structure. It would not be appropriate to comment on the future of individual units while that process is under way.

Range Safety Certificates

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish the detailed criteria for the granting of range safety certificates for full-bore ranges in disused quarry sites;

(2) what changes there have been in the criteria for the assessment of range safety certificates in the last three years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The criteria against which range safety certificates for civilian ranges are issued are the same as those for MOD ranges. There are no plans to publish the criteria, which have not been changed in the last three years.

Search-and-Rescue Operations

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has completed his consideration of the contractorisation of search-and-rescue operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of the "Options for Change" review of the future size and shape of the armed forces, the Ministry of Defence is currently studying the provision of military SAR. A decision on the contractorisation of part of the military SAR task will be taken after this work has been completed.

Army Manpower

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the need for redeployment measures in the light of his recent announcement of a reduction in Army personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I assume that my hon. Friend's question relates to resettlement provision for those Army personnel who might be made redundant as a result of reductions in the strength of the Army. Those made redundant will have access to the same resettlement support as is provided to those leaving the services at the end of a normal engagement or commission. They will receive advice and counselling, and will also receive up to 28 days' training to equip them with new skills or assist them in transferring their existing skills to the civilian job market. In addition they will be able to obtain assistance with job finding from the Army Resettlement Employment Liaison Cell, or from the Officers Association or the Regular Forces Employment Association, both of which receive funding from the MOD.

Defence Estimates

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the Statement on the Defence Estimates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: The Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991 will be published on 9 July.

Arab Industrial Organisation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the British military attaché in Cairo has met the director of the Arab Industrial Organisation in Egypt this year.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our normal practice to discuss the duties of military personnel attached to our posts overseas.

Wyre Forest

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has for the use of the facility at Drakelow lane in Wyre Forest; and what is the annual cost of maintaining this facility.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has no further use for its site at Drakelow, Wolverley and negotiations for its sale are currently in progress. No annual maintenance costs are being incurred; part of the site is let and producing rent.

Options for Change

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been taken on the implementation of "Options for Change" in the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have identified a number of measures needed to ensure the most effective use of the resources available for defence.

Subject to the usual consultation with the trade unions we have decided to close RAF Hullavington and No. 7 Flying Training School at RAF Church Fenton starting in April 1992, and RAF Abingdon by May 1993. The RAF elementary flying training school will be relocated from RAF Swinderby to RAF Topcliffe in July 1993. We have also decided that it should additionally be possible to close RAF West Raynham at some future date. No. 16 and No. 58 Squadrons, RAF Regiment, will be disbanded on 1 April 1992, and No. 63 Squadron RAF Regiment will be disbanded on 1 October 1992. These changes are part of the move towards smaller, better equipped, properly trained and housed and well-motivated armed forces announced by my right hon. Friend on 25 July 1990. Further announcements on the implementation of "Options for Change" in the RAF will be made as decisions are taken.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 3 July 1991

TRANSPORT

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the proportion of *(a)* male drivers and *(b)* younger male drivers who were killed who were over the legal alcohol limit for each year since 1979.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is in the table.

Fatally injured male drivers and riders: estimated percentage over legal blood alcohol limit by age: Great Britain: 1979 to 1989

	Aged up to 21	*All ages*
1979	32	32
1980	29	32
1981	23	30
1982	28	34
1983	24	28
1984	27	27
1985	21	25
1986	26	25
1987	22	27
1988	21	22
1989	17	20

Motorways

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which methods of assessing the extent of mitigation of the M40's environmental impact *(a)* have and *(b)* have not, been applied to the M11 link road; and for those in *(a)* what relative values have been applied.

Mr. Chope: The environmental impact of the M40 extension, which runs for 59 miles through largely agricultural land, cannot be directly compared with an urban scheme such as the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 link road. The Department's methodology for environmental appraisal is applied to all road proposals, but the measures required to mitigate the adverse effects are dependent on the individual nature of each project. In the case of the M11 link road, a significant amount of the cost of the scheme is for measures to mitigate the adverse effects of the road including the construction of three sections of tunnel.

Ministerial Correspondence

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons Ministers in his Department have not complied with the prime ministerial guideline that all Ministers should accompany their replies to Members' letters with a copy of that reply.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is, and always has been, the practice of the ministerial correspondence unit in the Department of Transport, to enclose a copy of letters from Ministers to Members, along with the original—and any enclosures, for example, press notices—of any replies dealing with constituents' correspondence.

If, however, a subject has been raised by a Member, and no specific constituent is involved, only the original of the reply is sent.

The ministerial correspondence unit is particularly aware of the importance of enclosing a copy of replies involving constituents during recesses, when Members are dealing with correspondence from their homes.

Airline Employees

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps were taken to secure the terms and conditions of employment of the TWA. United Kingdom-based employees being transferred to American Airlines as a result of his decision to allow American Airlines to take over the TWA Heathrow routes;

(2) if he will make it his policy, when he agrees to the transfer of airline routes from one foreign airline to another, to take steps to ensure the protection of employment terms and conditions of United Kingdom employees concerned.

Mr. McLoughlin: These arrangements are matters for the companies concerned and their employees, subject to any relevant rules regarding employment protection and transfer. They are not matters in which I intervene and I have no plans to change my policy in this respect.

Shipping

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current level of investment by British shipowners in new capacity and the tonnage to be built.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1989, United Kingdom shipowners placed orders for 29 new vessels and took delivery of a further 34 second-hand vessels at an estimated total cost of £462 million. Comparable figures for 1990 are in preparation. I will write to the hon. Member with this information as soon as it becomes available.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has a strong and continuing policy commitment to improve transport facilities for disabled people.

A summary of recent developments and current priorities is contained in the annual report for 1990 from my Department's disability unit, a copy of which is in the library.

Severn Bridge (Gantry Accident)

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is able to announce the outcome of the investigations he commissioned into the accident to a maintenance gantry on the Severn bridge on 4 September 1990.

Mr. Chope: I am publishing the report of the investigations today and am placing a copy in the Library. I accept the broad thrust of all the recommendations in the

report. As the report itself recognises, further work will be necessary before deciding exactly how certain of the recommendations are to be pursued; this work is already under way.

ENVIRONMENT

Toxic Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table to show the amounts of *(a)* hazardous and *(b)* toxic wastes imported into Great Britain from (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) the Irish Republic in each of the past five years for incineration.

Mr. Baldry: Information on the importation of waste into Great Britain has been available only since the introduction of the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations in October 1988. No distinction is made in the regulations between hazardous and toxic waste.

From 1 October 1988 to 31 March 1989, a total of 29·4 tonnes of hazardous waste for incineration were imported through English ports from the Irish Republic. The equivalent figure for 1989-90 is 89·1 tonnes. Final figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

The provision of information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively. Information on trade within the United Kingdom is not held centrally.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the quantity of toxic and hazardous wastes arising from the operations of the Du Pont company in Northern Ireland which is transferred to the incinerators of the Cleanaway and Raychem plants in Great Britain each year.

Mr. Trippier: None. Monitoring the movement of hazardous waste within the United Kingdom is the responsibility of local waste disposal authorities.

Housing Grant

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will produce a table showing *(a)* the level of grant made by the Housing Corporation to housing associations within each one of the five West Yorkshire local authorities in each of the past five years, *(b)* the housing needs index for each authority in each year, *(c)* the excess or shortfall of grant over or below housing needs index for each authority in each year and *(d)* the total excess or shortfall for each authority over the five-year period; and if he will outline the criteria used by the Housing Corporation which would cause the grant made to housing associations within each local authority being either above or below that authority's housing needs index.

Mr. Yeo: The distribution of resources among local authority areas is a matter for the Housing Corporation. I have, therefore, asked the corporation to reply direct to my hon. Friend with the information he has requested. A copy of the reply will be placed in the Libraries of the House. It should be noted, however, that although the housing needs indicator is the best means available for allocating resources to Housing Corporation regions, for statistical reasons it is less reliable at local level. In determining priorities within the regions, therefore, the corporation's regional offices also use their own assessment of need, informed by discussions with local authorities in their enabling role.

Ministerial Conference, Czechoslovakia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representation the United Kingdom had at the ministerial conference for environment in Europe held in Drobis, Czechoslovakia on 22-23 June; and what decisions were taken at the conference.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* I attended the "Environment for Europe" ministerial conference held in Drobis last week where we discussed ways for further strengthening co-operation to protect and improve the environment, long-term strategies towards a European protection and restoration system and an environmental programme for Europe. The conclusions of the conference have been made available in the Library.

Valuation Rules

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance which has been issued to valuation officers on the interpretation of Statutory Instrument 474/91; and whether this guidance makes reference to the presence of en suite bathrooms or of tea-making facilities as relevant to assessing whether a householder is excluded from the business rate concession.

Mr. Maples: I have been asked to reply.

It is not our practice to disclose instructions which are issued for the confidential guidance of staff, but when deciding whether a household is to be excluded from non-domestic rating valuation officers will have regard to all the facilities provided and the intensity of business use. No particular facility will be considered in isolation, but only in relation to all the circumstances of the case.

DEFENCE

Mr. William Douglas-Home

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) of 17 June, *Official Report*, column *65*, if he will publish the decision reached in the review of the case of the hon. William Douglas-Home, and the reasons for it.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. This is a private matter between the Ministry of Defence and the hon. William Douglas-Home.

Anti-personnel Minefields

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries where United Kingdom forces are helping to discover and disarm anti-personnel minefields.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Royal Engineers are currently deployed in Colombia, the Falkland islands and Kuwait. In Colombia they are providing bomb search and disposal

training as part of the Government's package of anti-drugs assistance. In the Falkland islands the explosive ordnance disposal detachment of the garrison field squadron is responsible for monitoring the minefields left behind by the Argentine invasion forces in 1982. In Kuwait, in the aftermath of hostilities, Royal Engineers co-ordinated the multinational effort of marking Iraqi-laid minefields. The current activities of the Royal Engineers in Kuwait do not include specific tasking on the search for and disarming of anti-personnel mines, but concentrate on the disposal of unexploded ordnance.

Royal Ordnance Factories

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of the future of Ministry of Defence police currently involved in policing of Royal Ordnance plc sites at Chorley, Radway Green, Nottingham, Bridgewater and Glascoed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number of Ministry of Defence police officers to be based at each factory remains the subject of negotiations between the Ministry of Defence and Royal Ordnance plc.

Operation Granby

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of service personnel being treated for anxiety disorders or other psychiatric problems resulting either wholly or partially from Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Seventy-nine service personnel are at present receiving treatment within service facilities for anxiety disorders or other psychiatric problems resulting wholly or partially from Operation Granby.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have had some form of treatment for anxiety disorders or other psychiatric problems resulting either wholly or partially from Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the treatment of *(a)* service personnel suffering from anxiety disorders or other psychiatric problems resulting either wholly or partially from Operation Granby and *(b)* their families.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The services aim to identify and treat service personnel and their families suffering from anxiety disorders or other psychiatric problems at the earliest possible time. Service personnel would be treated within their community at service facilities and their dependents would be treated in both service and NHS facilities according to location.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions have been issued to unit commanders involved in Operation Granby regarding service personnel suffering from anxiety disorders or other psychiatric problems resulting either wholly or partially from Operation Granby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The policy for the early identification and treatment of anxiety disorders and other psychiatric problems is well established within the services. Personnel at all levels have been briefed on the need for continued support in the aftermath of Operation Granby.

Dartmoor National Park

Mr. Hannam To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the licence agreement for military training in the Dartmoor national park has been renewed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The use of Dartmoor will remain crucial for effective military training, as it is the only primary training area in the south-west of England. The requirement for Duchy of Cornwall land on Dartmoor for military training purposes therefore continues to be in the national interest.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many accesses were made to each index of the police national computer over the past year; and whether he will include in these statistics an indication of the number of access requests that could search more than one index.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Royal Ulster Constabulary does not have direct access to the police national computer but can indirectly obtain information from the computer by arrangement with police forces in Great Britain. Statistics are not maintained by the RUC on the number of inquiries made each year, but I understand from the chief constable that useage of this facility is infrequent.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about next steps agencies in his Department.

Mr. Brooke: I am pleased to announce three new candidates for executive agency status. These are:

The vehicle inspection and driving test centres in the Department of the Environment;

The child support agency in the Department of Health and Social Services; and

Criminal compensation in the Northern Ireland Office.

Further details on the timing of the launch of these agencies will be announced in due course.

Railways

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what conclusions he has reached on the report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on railway services provided by Northern Ireland Railways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I have placed today in the Library of the House the initial response produced by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company and Northern Ireland Railways, to the report submitted by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in December 1990.

I am grateful to the commission for the comprehensive review it carried out. While commending NIR's

management for its dedication and resilience in maintaining services despite terrorist disruption and confirming that the company did not operate against the public interest, the commission found that there was scope for improving efficiency and reducing costs. The commission identified the principal challenges facing the company as the need to modernise a railway heavily dependent on subsidy, the rationalisation of its complex pay system, sharp competition from bus and car, and the effect of terrorist disruption on the passenger base.

The report made 34 recommendations and all have been accepted. Some are already being implemented. Others require further consideration about the manner of implementation. The outcome should be a significant improvement of services to the public and the management of the company.

The Department continues to be in dialogue with the Transport holding company and Northern Ireland Railways about the implementation of the recommendations and I shall report on progress to the House in due course.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The information until 31 December 1991 is as follows:

Crime Prevention Public Awareness Campaign—multi media
Environmental Awareness and Energy Efficiency—multi media
Job Training Programme—multi media
Pedestrian Safety—television

WALES

Conwy Tunnel

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what arrangements were made in his Department for the financial and technical screening of sub-contractors working on the Conwy tunnel;

(2) how many sub-contractors have been used on the construction of the Conwy tunnel; and how many of these have gone into liquidation.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In selecting main contractors invited to tender for all motorway and trunk road projects, the Department satisfied itself on the financial and technical ability of the chosen companies. In accordance with the Department's standard conditions of contract, the main contractor is fully responsible for the acts, defaults and neglects of any sub-contractor, his agents, servants or workmen. As such, the Department is not required to screen sub-contractors. Similarly the Department would not need to be made aware of any sub-contractor who may have gone into liquidation. The Conwy tunnel project has been subject to these normal procedures. The number of sub-contractors used to date on the project is in excess of 60.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the efficiency of the construction of the Conwy tunnel compared with that of similar projects elsewhere.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In selecting main contractors invited to tender for all motorway and trunk road projects, the Department satisfies itself on the financial and technical capability of such contractors. In accordance with the Department's standard conditions of contracts, contractors have an obligation to meet the requirements of the contract both in terms of timescale and standard. The Department appoints agents or consultant engineers for each project to watch and supervise the construction of the works. The Conwy tunnel project is subject to these normal procedures.

NHS Administrators

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to cut back the number of NHS administrators in Wales to 1979 levels.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Responsibility for the number of administrative staff employed in the NHS in Wales is a matter for the appropriate health authority. The NHS reforms will deliver a better-managed and more responsive service in which resources follow patients and manpower requirements reflect local service needs. Provision of health care is now governed by district contracts in which quality and costs are continually scrutinised. In the year to March 1990—the latest period for which figures are available—management, administrative and clerical staff costs accounted for approximately 10·2 per cent. of the salary budget for district health authorities, including the Welsh Health Common Services Authority as opposed to 12·2 per cent. in the year to March 1979.

Sport in Schools

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the average number of hours allocated to compulsory sport in Wales generally and in each local education authority area for secondary schools in each year between 1979 and 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Sport is not a compulsory activity in maintained schools. Physical education, which includes such sporting activities as team games, swimming and athletics, has been included as a national curriculum subject in schools for pupils aged five to 14 since autumn 1990 under the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988. It will shortly become a national curriculum subject for pupils aged 14 to 16.

Information is not maintained centrally on time spent in secondary schools on sporting activities as part of PE.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the average amount of playing area in hectares and acres in *(a)* primary schools in Wales, *(b)* secondary schools in Wales and *(c)* all schools; and what was the equivalent figure in 1976, 1979 and 1984;

(2) what percentage of Welsh schools have *(a)* a swimming pool, *(b)* a sports hall and *(c)* a gymnasium; and what were the equivalent percentages in 1979, 1984 and 1989.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in Wales; and how many primary and secondary schools have (i) no designated playing fields or (ii) no designated playgrounds.

Sir Wyn Roberts: On 1 January 1991 there were 1,717 primary and 230 secondary schools in Wales. The Education (Schools Premises) Regulations 1981 lay down minimum standards for the provision of recreation areas and playing fields in schools. Local education authorities are responsible for applying those standards, and information on these matters is not collected centrally.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of livestock carcases dumped on *(a)* council refuse tips, *(b)* road side verges, *(c)* forests and woodlands and *(d)* rivers and lakes in Wales in each year from 1985 to 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to set up a network of disposal centres for dead livestock in Wales; and how much has been spent by his Department during each of the past five years on developing incinerators and digesters for dead livestock in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is essentially the responsibility of the livestock sector to find ways of handling its waste within the framework of environmental and health restrictions. Under the farm and conservation grant scheme, on-farm grants are available to assist with waste disposal, and for on-farm anaerobic digesters for animal waste, including carcase waste. Grant aid for incinerators or disposal pits could be made only at the expense of the areas already covered.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many specific places on employment training the Government plan should be made available for adults with learning difficulties in 1992 in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Regulations

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he was consulted by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee on its new proposals regarding fire regulations;

(2) what response he will make to the new proposals on fire regulations in the Building Regulations Advisory Committee report published on 26 June.

Mr. John Patten: The Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC) advises the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales on matters concerning the building regulations. My understanding is that the committee held a meeting on 26 June, but its proceedings are confidential and no public report or statement has been made about the outcome of that meeting. There is no reason for the committee to consult Ministers or for Ministers to respond publicly to its reports. The Home Office has an observer on the committee and is represented on the committee's fire advisory panel and its stage 2 review committee which have been advising the committee on the fire safety aspects of its proposals. In addition, Home Office officials are in regular contact with officials of the Department of the Environment to ensure that there is no disagreement on the fire safety aspects of any proposed changes to the regulations.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from chief fire officers with regard to the Building Regulations Advisory Committee proposals to change fire regulations for buildings in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No such representations have been received, but I understand that chief fire officers have made their views known to the Department of the Environment both in a written submission from the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association in response to the public consultation document which was issued by the Department in March 1990 and orally at a meeting.

Prisoners (Drug Dosage)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons information on the number of doses of drugs administered to inmates of penal establishments became unavailable between the answers to the hon. Member for Warrington, South on 20 January 1988, *Official Report*, columns *706-8* and on 26 June, *Official Report*, column *475*.

Mrs. Rumbold: Statistics relating to the number of doses of medicines administered to prisoners in all establishments in England and Wales were last published in the Report on the Work of the Prison Department 1985/86 (Cm. 11) They were partly estimated because some prisons were unable to furnish the required information. Since corresponding information for 1986-87 was given to my hon. Friend in 1988 in respect of certain establishments an increasing number of prison pharmacies have failed to provide local statistics owing to staffing difficulties.

A further factor has been the increasing diversity in prison medicine regimes. This development has led us to reassess the value of the statistics for management purposes and to accept the view expressed by the Social Services Committee in 1986—third report from the Social Services Committee, Session 1985-86: "Prison Medical Service"—that their publication serves no useful purpose.

In the light of these factors central collection of these statistics has been discontinued.

Racist Incidents

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racially motivated incidents were reported to each police force in England and Wales in 1988, 1989 and 1990; what was the nature of the incidents reported; and what was the outcome.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The publication of the number of racial incidents reported to forces is a matter for chief

officers. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary collects forces' figures centrally—the totals for 1988, 1989 and 1990, including figures from the Metropolitan police, are as follows:

	Number
1988	4,383
1989	5,044
1990	6,359

The nature of these incidents varies greatly and is not centrally recorded. Their common factor is that, in each case, a racial motivation was perceived by the victim, the investigating officer or a third party. The outcome of each reported incident is a matter for chief officers, but Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary monitors as a priority the response of forces to Home Office guidance on tackling racial attacks and harassment.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of West Yorkshire about attacks on Muslim graves in Bradford and Leeds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have every confidence that the force is responding to these attacks promptly and effectively. I understand that attacks in Bradford in May led to several arrests, and that two people are on bail pending charges. An attack in Leeds last week is under investigation. The police have kept in close contact with leaders of the Muslim community throughout.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racial attacks were reported to the police during 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[pursuant to his reply, 20 May 1991, c. 346]:* Six thousand three hundred and fifty-nine racially motivated incidents were reported to police forces in England and Wales during 1990.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department does not have the major responsibility for any of the matters on which the manifesto makes recommendations. But we shall continue to work towards enabling people with disabilities, including, where applicable, our own staff, to maximise their potential and to contribute fully to all aspects of the life of the community.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table to show for each magistrates court area, for the year ended 31 March 1990, the number of *(a)* summonses for domestic rates arrears, *(b)* defendants present, *(c)* defendants not present, *(d)* committals and *(e)* hours each court sat.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available from central records, and to the extent that it could be obtained at all could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Custody Time Limits

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the further extension of custody time limits.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I intend to lay regulations which will, with effect from 1 October, extend custody time limits in London, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey and Sussex. In Birmingham, the time limit to committal will be reduced from 84 to 70 days.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now advise local authorities how they can enforce the law on Sunday trading.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 2 July 1991]:* As I indicated in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) on 17 June at columns *27-28*, we do not consider it either appropriate or necessary to issue guidance about the enforcement of the law on Sunday trading to local authorities; and no development since then causes us to alter that judgment. Responsibility for enforcing the provisions about Sunday trading in the Shops Act 1950 was given by Parliament to local authorities. The authorities have power to enforce those provisions whether by way of a prosecution or a civil action seeking an injunction. Decisions on the means by which to fulfil their responsibility are a matter for the authorities, in consultation with their legal advisers.

Sexual and Physical Violence

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what practical assistance is offered by Her Majesty's Government to women victims of sexual and physical abuse in relation to the provision of refuges;

(2) what plans he has to extend financial support beyond the National Women's Aid Federation to other groups that are affiliated to this federation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have been asked to reply.

Practical assistance and funding for individual refuges are local matters, and there are no plans to change this. However, many residents in women's refuges are entitled to and receive social security benefits, and individual refuges receive practical advice and support from the Women's Aid Federation (England) Ltd. which is grant-aided by the Department.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ex-service Men and Women

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he has given to introducing a more comprehensive system of support with his Department to deal with problems faced by ex-service men and women.

Miss Widdecombe: The social security system treats ex-service men and women in the same way as other

customers. In addition, under the war pensions scheme administered by the Department, war pensions and allowances are payable where disablement or death occurs as a result of service in the armed forces; the war pensioners welfare service also provides advice to war pensioners and war widows on war pension matters and help and support with general welfare problems. The war pensions welfare service works closely with other Government Departments and agencies, including war pension committees and voluntary organisations representing ex-service men and women.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are in place for notifying the terminally ill of successful applications for attendance allowance; if he has any plans to review these; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: People awarded attendance allowance under the terminal illness provisions are notified that they qualify under the special rules. The special rules are not defined in the award notice. The standard leaflet—DS 668—issued with the notice explains the conditions for the allowance and the rules for review and appeal, and gives information on other benefits and help available. It also describes the terminal illness criteria, but does not link them to the special rules.

The arrangements for the terminal illness provisions are kept continually under review. We have no specific plans to amend the arrangements for the notification of awards.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Our strategy on benefits for people with disabilities, was set out in "The Way Ahead"—Cm 917. The strategy provides a more comprehensive and coherent system of benefits for people with disabilities than ever before, laying firm foundations for the future. The changes set out in "The Way Ahead" concentrate new help where it is needed most—on people with moderate to severe disabilities who just fail to qualify for attendance allowance or mobility allowance, on those disabled from birth or in their early years who have lost the opportunity to earn and save, and on those who would like to work but are prevented by disincentives in the benefit system.

The cornerstone of the strategy is the introduction of two new benefits. Disability living allowance for people disabled under age 65, replaces and extends the help currently available through attendance allowance and mobility allowance, bringing new help with extra costs to nearly 300,000 disabled people. Disability working allowance will offer around 50,000 disabled people who are capable of some work a new choice of earnings topped up by benefit. These two new benefits plus other important initiatives announced in "The Way Ahead" will bring extra help to an estimated 850,000 disabled people and their carers.

Direct Payment of Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *232*, regarding payment to claimants' bank accounts, if he has now issued the guidance; and if he will send a copy to the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Miss Widdecombe: The issue of guidance to local offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the benefits agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensions Ombudsman

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish the first report of the pensions ombudsman.

Mr. Newton: The pensions ombudsman, Mr. Michael Platt, has submitted to me his first report in accordance with section 59B(6) of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. The report covers the period from Mr. Platt's appointment on 2 January 1991 to 31 March 1991, and describes the setting up of his offices and other aspects of the establishment of the service. I have today arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

ENERGY

Piper Alpha Inquiry

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has received Lord Cullen's direction under regulation 9(2) of the Offshore Installations (Public Inquiries) Regulations 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Lord Cullen's direction was received by my Department on 12 June 1991. He directed that four fifths of the costs of part 1 of the Piper Alpha inquiry shall be paid by Occidental Petroleum (Caledonia) Ltd. A copy of Lord Cullen's direction and notes have been placed in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Violence Against Women

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to include education on violence against women in the national curriculum.

Mr. Fallon: The National Curriculum Council's guidance to schools on health and citizenship education contains advice relevant to such education across the whole curriculum.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to encourage education on violence against women in courses studied in institutions of higher and further education.

Mr. Eggar: It is for the academic authorities in each institution to decide on the content of the education provision made by the institution, subject to the requirements of any validating body.

Women Teachers

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what the proportion of women among primary school teachers was for the years 1979, 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Fallon: Figures for women teachers as a percentage of qualified teachers in maintained nursery and primary schools in England for the years requested are as follows:

Year	*Percent*
1979	78
1985	79
1990	82

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend will give careful consideration to the education recommendations in the manifesto. His general view is that the position of pupils with special educational needs is adequately protected by the Education Act 1981 which requires that wherever possible such children should be taught in ordinary schools. The Department is not aware of any widespread failure by LEAs to meet their various obligations under the Act.

Veterinary Schools

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *131*, what information he has on the capital and current funds allocated by the Universities Funding Council for 1991-92 for the upgrading of animal accommodation in veterinary schools.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The UFC circular letter 7/91 of 25 February, a copy of which is in the Library, indicated that the council intends to contribute nearly £70 million over three years for building works and equipment to assist universities in meeting the requirements of the code of practice under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. In 1991-92, £35 million is being assigned, of which some £10 million is from capital grant.

Braille

Mr. Batterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what budget his Department has for the production of materials in braille.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has no budget for the production of materials in braille. The GCSE examining groups and the GCE A and AS-level examining boards cover the cost of brailling examination papers by making a small addition to the examination entry fees of all candidates. In the case of candidates from maintained schools, those fees are met by the local education authorities.

EMPLOYMENT

Working Hours

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish his Department's working papers in support of the figure claimed for the cost of the EC directive on working hours.

Mr. Forth: A memorandum prepared by my Department on the costs of the social action programme to the United Kingdom and the methods used to derive these cost estimates has already been published in the report by the House of Lords Select Committee on European Communities on "Part time and temporary employment" —Session 1990-91, 2nd report, pp 33-45.

The European Commission has meanwhile published a revised version of the draft working time directive taking account of amendments proposed by the European Parliament. Using the same method as in the original calculation, my Department estimates that the direct costs to employers of implementing the directive as amended would be increased by over £500 million to at least £2·5 billion.

Occupational Health Nurses

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when Her Majesty's Government intend to ratify the International Labour Organisation convention 161 on occupational health nurses.

Mr. Forth: The Government expect to receive advice from the Health and Safety Commission next year on ILO convention 161, in the light of which they will give further consideration to whether to ratify the convention in question.

Enterprise Agencies

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many enterprise agencies there are; how many there were in 1989; what was the cost to the public funds in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I know of 421 local enterprise agencies operating in the United Kingdom. Of these, 408 are approved by my Department under the statutory provisions which allow for tax relief on donations to them. In 1989, the total number of approved agencies was 396.

Government funding of local enterprise agencies in England has been primarily through my Department's local enterprise agency grant and project schemes—LEAGS and LEAPS. During 1989-90 total funding under LEAGS and LEAPS was £1,879, 562 and during 1990-91, the final year of the schemes, it was £1,932,714.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Department is committed to giving people with disabilities the opportunity to participate fully in training and employment. We therefore provide a wide

range of specialist schemes and services to help them gain and keep employment and develop within it. People with disabilities also have access to the full range of non-specialist employment and training services, which will include the new work experience programme that my right hon. and learned Friend announced recently, employment action. In many cases access to non-specialist provision allows for reduced eligibility or length of stay rules and special help for people with disabilities.

We are already giving careful consideration to ways of improving the effectiveness of this provision for people with disabilities. Last year the Department issued two consultative documents that considered all the employment and training services we provide for people with disabilities and put forward many proposals for improvement. We received responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals, including almost all of the organisations that produced the disability manifesto. Responses are still being considered on some issues, but we have announced our first decisions. These concerned improvements in the specialist services provided by the Employment Service and in our local and national advisory machinery. We will announce other decisions as soon as they are reached, including any changes to the legislative framework.

My right hon. and learned Friend also launched the new symbol that is currently being successfully promoted by the Employment Service to encourage and help employers to commit themselves publicly on a voluntary basis to good policies and practices in employing people with disabilities.

In addition, from April this year we have given unemployed people with disabilities priority access to four of our main employment and training programmes. They are now one of the key groups for entry onto employment training, the enterprise allowance scheme, job clubs and the job interview guarantee scheme. Training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service will ensure that people with disabilities who are unemployed will be given this priority recognition. My right hon. and learned Friend has written to TEC chairmen about this priority and special guidance has been issued about people with special training needs, including people with disabilities, so as to help TECs plan and implement their strategies for taking action. The increased priority will help strengthen the opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in the labour market.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many specific places on employment training he plans to make available for adults with learning difficulties in 1992.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not available, but I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to his question on 2 July, at column *108*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Investment (Information)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Government statistics on investment in United Kingdom industry differentiate between domestic investment and investment into the United Kingdom from other countries.

Mr. Maples: The annual census of production provides data on capital expenditure by manufacturing businesses located in the United Kingdom analysed by the country of incorporation of the enterprise. These data are published in Central Statistical Office Business Monitor PA 1002, available in the Library.

No information is however available on the country from which such expenditure is financed. Data on direct investment capital flows are published in CSO bulletin 33/91 also available in the Library. It should be noted that these relate to international flows between related companies and not to investment in capital goods.

"This Common Inheritance"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, columns *648-49*, on his Department's environmental policies, if he will list the policies which have been subject to the arrangements for considering environmental implications since the publication of "This Common Inheritance", Cm. 1200.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As I explained in my reply on 1 March at columns *648-49*, I consider all departmental policies with possible environmental implications. For example, I considered the environmental effects of the changes in the tax system announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement, in particular the further increase in the differential in between rates of excise duty charged on leaded and unleaded petrol and the increased rates of excise duties on hydrocarbon oils. My predecessor also reviewed the regulations governing the civil service mileage allowances.

I have also kept under review the implications for Treasury policies of international discussions on climate change.

Commemorative Crown

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government have any plans to issue a new United Kingdom commemorative crown.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that a new commemorative crown be issued in 1993 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the coronation.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy toward the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Treasury has an equal opportunity policy discussed with the departmental trade union side, kept under continuous review and published in a guide issued to staff. One of the guiding principles is that disability is no bar to recruitment or to advancement within the Department. Additional computer and office furniture have been provided to assist disabled staff. Where possible parking spaces are made available. All Treasury offices have wheelchair access.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Asia (Refugees)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he plans to provide for refugees in Asia.

Mrs. Chalker: I have approved an allocation of £8 million from this year's humanitarian aid budget, more than £6 million of which will be provided to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and to non-governmental organisations for their work with Afghan refugees. This is in recognition of the very serious continuing problems of the 5 million or so Afghans living in exile in Pakistan and Iran.

Assistance will also be made available for the work of UNHCR in Sri Lanka, the UN Border Relief Organisation (UNBRO) and NGOs working on the Thai-Cambodia border and with Vietnamese boat people.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications

19. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the level of activity in the telecommunications industry since 1986.

Mr. Lilley: Telecommunications is one of the most dynamic industries in the United Kingdom. Over the past five years the market has grown rapidly, stimulated by the Government's commitment to competition and increased customer choice. In mobile telephony we have the two largest cellular networks in the world, with 10 times as many customers as in 1986. In March my right hon. Friend announced that we would be ending the duopoly in the fixed telephony market, and allowing new companies to enter the market. We have already received five formal applications for new licences and over 20 strong expressions of interest. This is good for the industry, and good for consumers.

Manufacturing Output

20. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further plans he has to encourage an increase in manufacturing output.

26. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output.

Mr. Lilley: Manufacturing output will be helped by our policies of fostering and extending a competitive environment, encouraging innovation, improving incentives and, above all, defeating inflation.

Industrial Competitiveness

21. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans his Department has to increase public expenditure in order to help British industry become more competitive.

Mr. Sainsbury: A competitive market provides the best stimulus to efficiency. Government policies are designed to encourage competition.

Takeovers

23. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of companies acquired by other companies within the United Kingdom in each year from 1979 to 1990.

Mr. Redwood: The information that is available is as follows.

Acquisitions and mergers by industrial and commercial companies within the United Kingdom:

Year	*Companies acquired*
1979	534
1980	469
1981	452
1982	463
1983	447
1984	568
1985	474
1986	842
1987	1,528
1988	1,499
1989	1,337
1990	776

Source: Central Statistical Office Bulletin 29/91 dated 14 May 1991.

Exporters

24. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the various measures for the assistance of United Kingdom exporters which are currently available to them.

Mr. Sainsbury: The effectiveness of the range of export services available to United Kingdom companies through the DTI-FCO overseas trade services operation is monitored through a quality management system. Overall satisfaction rates exceed 70 per cent. for nearly all services, and 90 per cent. of our customers say that they will use our services again.

Aid to Industry

25. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the European Commission to discuss aid to industry.

Mr. Leigh: My Department and I meet representatives of the European Commission on a regular basis to discuss various matters including aid to industry.

Japanese Investment

27. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the current level of inward investment from Japan.

Mr. Leigh: Latest figures from the Central Statistical Office show that Japanese investment represents 4·1 per cent. of total foreign direct investment in the United Kingdom. The DTI knows of 158 Japanese companies manufacturing in the United Kingdom. According to Japanese Ministry of Finance statistics, 41 per cent. by value of all Japanese, manufacturing and non-manufacturing, investment in the EC at end of financial year 1990-91, came to the United Kingdom.

Nationalisation

28. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received any representations requesting him to consider nationalising certain industries.

Mr. Lilley: I have received a copy of the Labour party's document, "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change", which calls for a programme of nationalisation including British Telecom, the water industry and the national grid.

Information Technology

29. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the United Kingdom's current balance of trade in information technology.

Mr. Sainsbury: Information on trade in electronics and information technology products—defined as divisions 75 and 76 of the standard international trade classification —may be obtained from the monthly business monitor MM20 (Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom) copies of which are in the Library.

Shipbuilding and Marine Engines

30. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the shipbuilding and marine engine building industries in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: The futures of the United Kingdom's shipbuilding and marine engine building industries will depend on their respective abilities to win orders in the face of international competition.

Regional Assistance

31. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for increasing the percentage levels of regional assistance available in development areas.

Mr. Leigh: None.

Recession

32. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the British Chamber of Commerce to discuss the recession of industry.

Mr. Lilley: Officials of my Department keep in touch with the Association of British Chambers of Commerce on a wide range of business matters. I last met representatives of the ABCC on 5 June 1991.

Language Schools

33. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the change in turnover of language schools in London for each of the past three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Leigh: No such information is available.

Accountancy Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry further to his reply to the hon. Member forr Great Grimsby on 23 May, *Official Report*, column *627*, (1) if he will publish a list showing the dates on which the Institute of Chartered Accountants or the joint disciplinary scheme informed him of the result of their inquiries;

(2) if he will list the dates on which the reports were given to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is as follows:

	Name of Company	*Report sent*	*Decision notified*
1	Milbury plc Westminster Property Group Limited	26 October 1988	—
2	Minet Holdings plc WMD Underwriting Agencies Limited	13 August 1990	—
3	Alexander Howden Holdings plc	13 August 1990	—
4	The Greenbank Trust plc	19 June 1990	11 June 1991
5	Aldermanbury Trust plc	31 January 1991	—
6	Sound Diffusion plc	15 March 1991	—
7	The Animal Defence Society Limited	14 March 1991	—

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to propose legislation under which partners from the auditing firms implicated in money laundering will be barred for life from practising.

Mr. Redwood: Under part II of the Companies Act 1989 the recognised supervisory bodies must ensure that only fit and proper persons are eligible for appointment as company auditors. Paragraph 6(2)(c) of schedule 11 to the Act makes relevant provision in respect of partnerships.

Manufacturers (Exports)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policies of support and encouragement for the exporting of United Kingdom manufactures.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office provide, through oveseas trade services, a wide range of help, advice and support to exporters at each stage of the export process, from researching opportunities through to contacting and visiting markets. These services are described in "Export

Inititive—a pocket guide" a copy of which is in the Library. Some 2,000 staff in the two Departments are engaged, worldwide, in helping exporters.

The services we offer are available to those exporting both goods and services. In particular, we aim to help small and inexperienced exporters who, without Government encouragement, might never consider selling overseas; experienced exporters who are new to a particular market; and those pursuing project business, where Government influence is often not only helpful but vital when contracts are to be clinched.

Together with the FCO we have instituted regular independent monitoring of our services and the way in which they are delivered. The feedback received from industry shows overall satisfaction rates among our business customers exceeding 70 per cent. for nearly all services, and 90 per cent. of those monitored say they would use our services again.

It is encouraging to note the steady rise in the level of exports of manufactured goods in recent months. The efforts of those concerned are to be applauded.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: New technologies have improved the opportunities for participation of people with disabilities in the life of the community. This Department contributed as part of the information technology awareness campaign to a better understanding of possible applications of information technology and telecommunications products and services to benefit the disabled. Current policies and programmes to stimulate innovation in industry will lead to further developments, not only important to national economic growth but, in some cases, of particular value in the lives of those with disabilities.

Post Office

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will place in the Library copies of the report he commissioned on the Post Office by the consultants Ernst and Young.

Mr. Leigh: No, since I have commissioned no reports on the Post Office from the consultants Ernst and Young.

CBI

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the condition of industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: Ministers and officials of my Department keep in touch with the CBI on a wide range of business matters. I last met representatives of the CBI on 14 June 1991.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Dipping

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure the continuation of the compulsory national sheep dipping scheme for the foreseeable future;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that sheep scab remains a notifiable disease and that dipping be imposed on flocks in which scab is confirmed and on contiguous flocks.

Mr. Maclean: The future of compulsory dipping will depend on an assessment of the effectiveness of the existing arrangements, including the degree of commitment to them shown by the sheep industry. Changes in the arrangements for dealing with infected flocks were announced last year and will be implemented shortly.

Birds

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to reduce the number of sea birds drowned in monofilament nets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: A number of regulations and byelaws are concerned with the use of fishing nets. There is little evidence to suggest that these nets are threatening the survival of any species in our waters.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the number of wild-caught birds which were imported into the United Kingdom in 1987, 1988 and 1989 and indicate, for each year, the estimated proportion which died *(a)* in transit, *(b)* during the first 15 days of quarantine and *(c)* during the last 20 days of quarantine.

Mr. Maclean: The totals of captive birds imported into Great Britain, together with totals of mortalities on arrival and during quarantine are set out below. The figures do not distinguish wild-caught from captive-bred but most of the birds are considered to have been wild-caught. Information about the proportion of birds dying during particular periods of quarantine could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

	Captive birds imported total	*Number dead on arrival*	*(Percentage of total)*	*Number dead in quarantine*	*(Percentage of total)*
1987	163,699	3,480	(2·13)	13,521	(8·26)
1988	184,577	4,732	(2·56)	20,619	(11·17)
1989	184,601	4,015	(2·17)	19,471	(10·55)

Source: Return of Proceedings under the Animal Health Act 1981 for the year 1987; Importation of Birds Mortality Statistics from Quarantine Returns for the years 1988 and 1989. The figures exclude importations of performing doves, racing pigeons and exotic poultry.

Blue Ear Pig Disease

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of restrictions imposed on premises with suspected or confirmed cases of blue ear disease in the past 24 hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No new suspected or confirmed cases of blue ear pig disease were reported within the 24 hours at 3.30 pm on 3 July 1991.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place each day in the Library an updated report of the number of cases of blue ear disease and premises restricted, including the number of premises and their locations; and if he will also make a copy of this available to the hon. Member for South Shields at the same time.

Mr. Gummer: I have taken care to inform the House and the public at large of all significant developments in the current disease outbreak. I am arranging for the Library to receive a copy of the weekly returns made to the European Commission detailing the parishes in which one or more cases of the disease have been confirmed.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Immigration (Islamabad)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of visas granted and the number of refusals, arising from interviews undertaken in Islamabad for entry into Britain on 22 April.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of visas granted and refused in Islamabad on 22 April was as follows:

	Number
Granted	190
Refused	74

India

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has on the number of detentions without trial, the number of disappeared suspects and the number of deaths in detention in the Punjab in the current year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In January, the Indian Government announced that the number of detentions in the Punjab were 145 in 1988, 35 in 1989 and 16 in January-October 1990 under the National Security Act, and 3,685 in 1988, 2,146 in 1989 and 982 in January-September 1990 under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act. No more recent figures are available. We have no official information on numbers of disappeared suspects or of deaths occurring in Indian prisons.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of India on the level of human rights violations and abuse of the law in the Punjab in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indian Government are well aware of our concerns about human rights abuses, from our regular contacts with them. We have encouraged them to exercise maximum restraint in dealing with the serious terrorist violence they face as exemplified by the appalling massacre of train passengers by Sikh terrorists on 12 June.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report by Amnesty International on the Punjab, dated 10 May.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The FCO library has already received this report.

Eire

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make inquiries of the appropriate authorities in Eire to ascertain why three students from Shipley college, two Pakistani nationals the other a Bangladeshi national, all settled in the United Kingdom, were refused visas to enter Eire on 18 June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to intervene on behalf of foreign nationals who have been refused visas by independent sovereign states.

Diplomats

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the training of diplomats from central and eastern Europe.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following a recent competitive tender I am happy to announce that in the autumn the institute of international studies at Leeds university under the guiding hands of Professor David Dilks and Dr. John Hemery, will run a course to improve the skills of over 50 diplomats from a number of central and eastern European countries. This is a further aspect of the know-how fund programme to help the process of radical change in the civil services of those newly democratised countries.

HEALTH

General Practice Budgets

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the names and addresses of the general practices that will be budget holders in Northumberland from 1 April.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand from the chairman of the Northern regional health authority that there are eight general practices within the Northumberland family health services authority participating in the first wave of fundholding. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Peter Carr, the chairman of the Northern regional health authority for details.

Expenditure, North Staffordshire

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much expenditure on the national health service has increased in North Staffordshire in *(a)* real and *(b)* cash terms since May 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The North Staffordshire health authority was established on 1 April 1982. The annual accounts of the authority record total revenue expenditure of £71·2 million cash for 1982-83 and £124·0 million cash for 1989-90—the latest year available. Those figures represent increases of 74·2 per cent. in cash terms and 20·7 per cent. in real terms, measured at 1989-90 prices.

Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of the larger Staffordshire area health authority. The annual accounts of the health authorities responsible for services in Staffordshire as a whole record total expenditure of £68·3 million cash for 1978-79 and £234·9 million cash for 1989-90. Those figures represent increases of 244 per cent. in cash terms and 47 per cent. in real terms, measured at 1989-90 prices.

HIV

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to identify the level of HIV infection in the United Kingdom and the consequential cost to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The surveillance of HIV infection and AIDS is based on voluntary confidential reporting by clinicians of AIDS cases, monitoring of named HIV-1 tests through laboratory reports, a collaborative study in selected laboratories of named HIV tests, and the unlinked anonymous HIV prevalence monitoring programme. In England and Wales this surveillance effort is co-ordinated by the public health laboratory services AIDS centre which is part of the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre. For the period April 1990 to March 1991 the PHLS AIDS centre received £415,000 to conduct AIDS surveillance and named HIV test monitoring and a further £678,000 was awarded to the PHLS by the Medical Research Council to conduct unlinked anonymous HIV prevalence monitoring.

Brook Hospital

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Brook hospital defence campaign and from the Greenwich "Hands off the NHS" group.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a letter from one right hon. Member on behalf of the "Hands off the NHS" group. No representations have been received from the Brook hospital defence campaign.

Project 2000

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to establish a formal mechanism for the annual review of the level of bursaries paid to nursing students pursuing Project 2000 courses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. Bursary levels will continue to be kept under review in the light of all relevant circumstances, in particular recruitment and retention.

Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive results for work on polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons from *(a)* the laboratory of the Government Chemist and *(b)* the London school of Tropical Hygiene, referred to in his answer of 12 June, *Official Report*, column *558*.

Mr. Dorrell: This Department has received a pre-publication copy of the report of the results of the study, by the laboratory of the Government Chemist, of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons present in cigarette smoke and they are included in a paper, "Yields of tar and other smoke components from UK cigarettes", which has been accepted for publication in the journal "Food and Chemical Toxicology", July 1991 issue, expected to appear late August. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The results of the investigation by the small area health statistics unit at the London school of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine into incidences of cancer and mortality rates around incinerators is expected this autumn. The results of its coking work investigations may take longer and it is not possible to give an expected date yet. The reports of both studies will be made public.

SCOTLAND

Water Boreholes

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what change has taken place over the past 10 years in the proportion of water extracted from boreholes rather than directly from watercourses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the 10 years to 1989, the water available for public supply from boreholes in Scotland increased from 0·4 to 1·6 per cent. of the available yield from all public sources. Surface water sources provide for over 96 per cent. of all Scottish public water supplies, the remainder coming from boreholes or springs.

River Purification Boards

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the river purification boards on the application of control orders under the conditions of the Spray Irrigation Act (Scotland) 1964; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Environment Department has long been aware that the river purification boards consider the arrangements for control orders under the Spray Irrigation (Scotland) Act 1964 inadequate. In particular, the procedures to be followed to obtain an order are seen as too bureaucratic.

New provisions are, therefore, included in the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991 to simplify these procedures and to extend control to all abstractions for irrigation purposes.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to bring forward amending legislation to give Scottish river purification boards the same powers as the National Rivers Authority in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no plans to make further amendments to the powers of the seven Scottish river purification boards. Scotland has enjoyed independent protection for the water environment since the 1950s

and the powers of the boards to prevent and control pollution have been progressively strengthened during this period.

Investment, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investment plans there are for the Foxbar Rivers area of Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For 1991-92 Renfrew district council has been allocated resources of £23·761 million to support capital investment in its own housing stock and private sector housing in Renfrew district. Apart from £0·757 million of this sum which is earmarked to fund innovative housing projects in the Ferguslie Park urban partnership area, it is a matter for the council to determine how best to deploy these considerable resources to meet local housing needs including those of the Foxbar Rivers area of Paisley if this area is considered a priority. The council's future investment plans for the Foxbar Rivers area should be included in the capital programme which the council is due to submit to the Scottish Office later this year.

Homelessness

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the Scottish Office currently spends to tackle homelessness in Scotland; how many applicants were permanently housed last year; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The statutory responsibility for assisting homeless people lies with local authorities.

Housing capital allocation issued to local authorities for 1991-92 are £452·504 million for housing revenue account expenditure and £111·097 million for non-housing revenue account expenditure, and include £3·5 million for homelessness projects in eight local authorities. Apart from the £3·5 million, the resources are not specifically identified to deal with homelessness, but local authorities may use general allocations for homelessness where this is seen as a local priority.

Almost all of Scottish Homes planned capital programme for 1991-92 of £312 million will contribute in some way to tackling homelessness; and in particular, over the past two years Scottish Homes has funded more than 1,000 units which specifically cater for the homeless.

In addition, revenue exxpenditure of £1·425 million has been made available through housing support grant to fund the estimated deficits on the provison of hostels by local authority housing departments.

Other funding has been made available as follows:

revenue grant assistance of £47,568 has been made available by my right hon. Friend to the Scottish Council for the Single Homeless;

a grant of £50,000 has been made to the Centre for Housing Research at Glasgow University for on-going research into the prevention and management of homelessness;

a total of £50,000 for each of the financial years 1991-92 to 1993-94 has been made available for the establishment of projects by voluntary organisations for single roofless young people;

funding of some £305,000 capital and £625,000 revenue was provided under the urban programme for homelessness related projects in 1990-91.

In 1989-90, the last year for which figures are available, 7,525 applicants who were assessed as homeless were found permanent accommodation and 4,681 of those assessed as potentially homeless.

External Funding

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Scottish Office external funding was applied to *(a)* the city of Glasgow district council, *(b)* the city of Dundee district council, *(c)* the city of Aberdeen district council, *(d)* Renfrew district council, *(e)* Bearsden and Milngavie district council and *(f)* Eastwood district council in (i) total and (ii) per capita terms in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is set out in the table. Prior to 1990-91, Government support to local authorities for general fund expenditure comprised rate or revenue support grant, and, in the case of district authorities, very small amounts of specific grant. For 1990-91 and 1991-92, aggregate external finance also included non-domestic rate income following the central determination of rate poundages.

Total Central Government support and per capita support

Glasgow

	Total Government support £ million	*Government support per capita £*
1979-80	34·223	41
1980-81	41·886	51
1981-82	38·195	48
1982-83	43·610	55
1983-84	44·578	58
1984-85	40·753	53
1985-86	42·673	57
1986-87	38·396	52
1987-88	40·894	56
1988-89	47·179	65
1989-90	56·736	79
1990-91	132·331	188
1991-92	148·921	216

Dundee

	Total Government support £ million	*Government support per capita £*
1979-80	4·795	25
1980-81	4·941	26
1981-82	4·595	24
1982-83	5·314	28
1983-84	5·805	31
1984-85	5·550	30
1985-86	6·501	36
1986-87	6·399	36
1987-88	6·934	39
1988-89	7·812	44
1989-90	7·807	44
1990-91	19·571	112
1991-92	26·784	155

Aberdeen

	Total Government support £ million	*Government support per capita £*
1979-80	3·911	19
1980-81	4·968	24
1981-82	5·358	25

	Total Government support £ million	Government support per capita £
1982-83	4·916	23
1983-84	5·414	25
1984-85	5·539	26
1985-86	3·510	16
1986-87	2·734	13
1987-88	2·441	11
1988-89	4·348	20
1989-90	4·460	21
1990-91	23·628	112
1991-92	30·367	144

Renfrew

	Total Government support £ million	Government support per capita £
1979-80	6,079	29
1980-81	7,722	36
1981-82	7,643	36
1982-83	8,221	39
1983-84	8,476	40
1984-85	8,452	40
1985-86	7,079	34
1986-87	7,764	38
1987-88	7,042	35
1988-89	7,891	39
1989-90	7,287	36
1990-91	19,221	96
1991-92	26,018	129

Bearsden and Milngavie

	Total Government support £ million	Government support per capita £
1979-80	1·164	30
1980-81	1·368	35
1981-82	1·333	34
1982-83	1·427	36
1983-84	1·456	37
1984-85	1·339	34
1985-86	0·673	17
1986-87	0·610	15
1987-88	0·548	14
1988-89	0·634	16
1989-90	1·177	29
1990-91	3·093	77
1991-92	4·343	106

Eastwood

	Total Government support £ million	Government support per capita £
1979-80	1·229	24
1980-81	1·438	28
1981-82	1·456	28
1982-83	1·750	33
1983-84	1·705	32
1984-85	1·428	26
1985-86	0·923	17
1986-87	0·901	16
1987-88	0·821	15
1988-89	0·974	17
1989-90	1·592	28
1990-91	3·599	61
1991-92	5·526	91

Notes:

1. Total government support comprises Revenue Support Grants for the years 1979-80 to 1989-90. For 1990-91 and 1991-92 external finance comprises RSG plus Specific Grants and estimated non-domestic rate income and in 1991-92 community charge grant is also included. Specific Grants were also paid in earlier years but figures are not readily available and therefore have been excluded.
2. Transactions on the Housing Revenue Account are excluded.
3. The per capita figures were calculated using the mid-year population estimates relevant to each year in question.

Race Relations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many racially motivated incidents were reported to each police force in Scotland in 1988, 1989 and 1990; what was the nature of the incidents reported; and what was the outcome.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of apparently racially motivated incidents reported to each police force in Scotland in the years in question are set out in the table.

Police force	*Number of incidents* 1988	1989	1990
Central Scotland police	9	18	45
Dumfries and Galloway constabulary	Nil	Nil	Nil
Fife constabulary	[1]	[1]	3
Grampian police	4	4	9
Lothian and Borders police	89	91	178
Northern constabulary	Nil	Nil	Nil
Strathclyde police	197	236	300
Tayside police	[1]	[2]27	101

[1] Not available.
[2] Since August 1989.

The majority of the incidents reported related to verbal abuse, breach of the peace, vandalism and assault. Forces have different methods of categorising outcomes; Strathclyde police reported a 90 per cent. detection rate in 1990 as regards the incidents in question.

House Construction

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average cost of constructing a *(a)* two-apartment, *(b)* three-apartment and *(c)* four-apartment house by (i) local authorities in Scotland and (ii) Scottish Homes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest available information was published in October 1989 in Scottish Development Department statistical bulletin HSU No. 10, a copy of which is in the Library. Updated information will be published later this year.

Green Belts

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to review policies relating to green belts in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The policy relating to green belts in Scotland is set out in the Scottish Development Department's circular 24/1985. All planning guidance is to be reviewed following a commitment contained in the White Paper on the environment "This Common Inheritance"—Cm. 1200—and a consultation paper on the scope of the review will be issued over the summer.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the level of community charge and *(b)* the per capita contribution from the Scottish Office, for each district council in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information for 1991-92 is set out in the table.

	Column 1 Community charge 1991-92 £	*Column 2 Total government support per capita* 1991-92 £
Berwickshire	9	99·98
Ettrick and Lauderdale	23	102·93
Roxburgh	20	111·45
Tweeddale	16	102·78
Clackmannan	90	127·49
Falkirk	21	113·56
Stirling	85	138·93
Annandale and Eskdale	40	91·42
Nithsdale	40	95·93
Stewartry	21	91·14
Wigtown	33	105·79
Dunfermline	46	110·03
Kirkcaldy	47	105·28
North East Fife	56	113·96
Aberdeen City	91	143·86
Banff and Buchan	40	104·67
Gordon	23	101·49
Kincardine and Deeside	4	94·27
Moray	16	105·14
Badenoch and Strathspey	10	108·24
Caithness	5	108·15
Inverness	5	99·87
Lochaber	35	139·51
Nairn	8	97·32
Ross and Cromarty	32	138·83
Skye and Lochalsh	13	166·14
Sutherland	17	137·15
East Lothian	66	122·55
Edinburgh City	108	157·21
Midlothian	54	107·48
West Lothian	33	106·17
Argyll and Bute	65	177·39
Bearsden and Milngavie	53	106·20
Clydebank	100	166·31
Clydesdale	69	117·44
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	38	101·82
Cumnock and Doon Valley	41	118·24
Cunninghame	80	126·69
Dumbarton	118	112·51
East Kilbride	88	88·28
Eastwood	19	90·59
Glasgow City	93	216·08
Hamilton	75	118·66
Inverclyde	59	135·81
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	51	109·32
Kyle and Carrick	89·5	115·25
Monklands	76	143·32
Motherwell	54	128·60
Renfrew	89	129·43
Strathkelvin	77	117·13
Angus	30	104·55
Dundee City	80	154·95
Perth and Kinross	38	114·60

Notes:

1. The figures in Column 1 take account of the Community Charge (General Reduction) Act 1991.
2. Total government support includes revenue support grant, community charge grant, estimated non-domestic rate income and estimated specific grants for each authority.
3. The figures in Column 2 were calculated using the population figures at June 1990.

Public Flood Warning Systems

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statutory requirements are in operation to provide advance public warning of flooding around the Scottish coast; if he will list those places which have a standard advance public flood warning system in operation; what form these systems take; what Government assistance is provided for this purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1991]:* River purification boards and islands councils have powers to provide and operate flood warning systems for their areas under the Agriculture Act 1970 as amended by the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982. However, there is no statutory requirement to provide advance warning of flooding. At present, flood warning systems, which depend on information from critical parts of the catchment, are in operation for several major rivers in Scotland. There are none specifically for coastal flooding.

The capital cost of providing flood warning systems is included in the capital expenditure allocations made to river purification boards and islands authorities. Operating costs are part of their normal revenue expenditure.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 4 July 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Family Law

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will state the composition of the family law administration working party; and when it last met.

The Solicitor-General: The family law and administration working party is chaired by a senior official of the Lord Chancellor's Department and its membership consists of officials of the Department of Health, Home Office, Department of Social Security, the Treasury and the Lord Chancellor's Department. The family law and administration working party last met on 5 February 1991.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the family law administration working party.

The Attorney-General: To date the working party has been primarily concerned with the very large number of arrangements necessary for the implementation of the Children Act 1989. The main parts of that Act are to take effect on 14 October 1991. Following implementation, the working party will proceed to review the other aspects of family law, as announced by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor on the Second Reading of the Children Bill on 6 December 1988, including the role and organisation of the support services, the reform of divorce law following publication of the Law Commission report and the law relating to domestic violence.

British National Party

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration the Director of Public Prosecutions is giving to prosecution of the British National party on grounds of incitement to racial hatred.

The Attorney-General: The Greater Manchester police have submitted a report to the Crown prosecution service concerning a meeting held by the British National party on 27 April 1991 at a school in Rochdale. This report is currently being considered by the Crown prosecution service with a view to determining whether any offence contrary to the Public Order Act 1986 or the Representation of the People Act 1983 has been committed by any individual.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he intends to announce his decision to authorise investment in class 373 rolling stock to provide a daytime service from the channel tunnel beyond London;

(2) whether tenders have been received for the manufacture of class 373 rolling stock to provide a daytime service from the channel tunnel beyond London.

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail is discussing with the manufacturers their recent proposals for the rolling stock to form the north of London day services. It is, therefore, not yet ready to submit an investment case.

A27

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to announce possible routes for the A27 Lewes to Polegate improvement scheme; how many options he intends to publish; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I hope that public consultation on possible routes for the A27 Lewes to Polegate improvement will begin around the end of this year. It is too early to say how many options will be published for comment.

M62 (Junction 13)

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when junction 13 on the M62 motorway at Worsley will be reopened; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Junction 13 was reopened fully at 9 pm on Friday 28 June.

HGV Speed Limiters

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish regulations requiring heavy goods vehicles to be fitted with speed limiters; and when he will announce firm proposals for speed limiters to be fitted to existing vehicles.

Mr. Chope: I have signed regulations today that require that speed limiters must be fitted to all new heavy goods vehicles of over 7·5 tonnes gross vehicle weight as from 1 August 1992.

Consultations are also beginning on draft regulations that will require speed limiters to be fitted to certain classes of existing heavy goods vehicles first used after 1 August 1988. The regulations will apply to all vehicles that have a gross vehicle weight in excess of 16 tonnes, and, additionally in the case of rigid-bodied vehicles, where the gross train weight is more than 5 tonnes greater than the gross vehicle weight.

The regulations for new vehicles give vehicle manufacturers and operators plenty of notice of the change; and I expect that regulations for vehicles that are already on the road will be laid before the House shortly.

Automated Weighbridges

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has concluded his consideration of the consultants' report on automated weighbridges referred to in his answer of 27 June 1990, *Official Report*, column *211*; if he intends to extend the installation of automated weighing systems beyond the five points which already have this facility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 April 1991]:* The consultants found that certain automatic, self-weigh systems worked well technically, but were largely

ineffective without the presence of enforcement officers. We have, therefore, concluded that the most effective deterrent to overloading continues to be weight checks carried out by traffic examiners.

On the more general question of enforcement at weighbridge sites, at inland locations and at ferry ports, I have asked the vehicle inspectorate to review the Department's current programme. The review will be completed by the end of this year.

M40

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that the carriageways of the M40 between junction 1 and Windsor road, Gerrards cross, which are currently under repair are resurfaced with pervious macadam rather than hot rolled asphalt.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* We are not able to justify the use of pervious macadam on this section of motorway. Pervious macadam costs more than conventional road surfacing and requires more frequent renewal maintenance. Further research is continuing on the use of this type of surfacing and it is hoped that in due course the causes of the additional costs will be overcome.

Ferry Safety

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to take any action to impose higher standards of residual stability on existing roll on/roll off ferries using British ports as recommended by the steering committee of the roll on/roll off ferry safety research programme.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The higher standard of residual stability recommended by the steering committee of the roll on/roll off ferry safety research programme, will be applied to existing roll on/roll off ferries using British ports in accordance with procedures agreed by the International Maritime Organisation.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables showing for the latest two years now available and for planned expenditure in 1991-92, identifiable general Government expenditure by function in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage of United Kingdom total identifiable general Government expenditure, *(c)* as an amount per capita and *(d)* as an amount per capita expressed as an index where United Kingdom identifiable Government expenditure = 100.

Mr. Mellor: The data requested for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90, the latest years for which information is available, are given in tables E4 and E5 of appendix E of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement"—Cm. 1520. Corresponding data for 1991-92 are not available.

Car Allowances

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the proportions of private cars, or car mileage as a proportion of the respective totals, where the costs incurred by the vehicles are not wholly met by the taxable income of their owners or drivers.

Mr. Maude: About one third of cars available for use by members of private households are either supplied by employers, or qualify for tax relief against schedule D income tax liability, or attract some allowance for business mileage.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the definition adopted by the Inland Revenue to identify large employers for the purposes of enforcing payment of remittances by the 19 of any month.

Mr. Maude: For the purposes of collecting PAYE and national insurance contributions remittances the Inland Revenue define large employers as those paying over £4,500 per month.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the expected additional revenue in 1991-92 from value added tax resulting from the increase from 15 to 17·5 per cent.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is published in table 1.1 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1991-92".

THE ARTS

English National Opera

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list for each of the last five years and for this year to date at today's prices, the amount of Government funding English National Opera has received; and if he will make a statement as to what controls his Office has over the way it is used.

Mr. Renton: Grants to individual arts companies are made by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the regional arts associations. Arts Council grants to English National Opera for the period in question were as follows:

Year	*Actual grant*	*1991-92 real terms equivalent*
	£	£
1986-87	6,626,000	9,197,043
1987-88	6,748,000	8,892,030
1988-89	6,917,000	8,482,962
1989-90	7,056,000	8,135,004
1990-91	9,104,000	9,741,238
1991-92	10,432,300	—

I set the overall financial framework within which the Arts Council operates; the Arts Council, in turn, attaches conditions to its grants to individual companies relating to their artistic and financial performance.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Grocery Retailing

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consider whether there are prima facie grounds for investigating whether there are scale and complex monopolies within the grocery retail sector.

Mr. Redwood: The Director General of Fair Trading continues to keep markets under review, but I understand that at present he has no evidence of abuse of market power that would justify a monopoly investigation of the retail grocery sector. Any evidence of abuse should be referred to the director general.

Telecommunications

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the telecommunications industry.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* Telecommunications is one of the most dynamic industries in the United Kingdom. The market has grown rapidly, stimulated by the Government's commitment to competition and increased customer choice. In mobile telephony we have the two largest cellular networks in the world. In March, I announced that we would be ending the duopoly policy in the fixed telephony market, and allowing new companies to enter the market. We have already received five formal applications for new licences and more than 20 strong expressions of interests. This is good for the industry and good for consumers.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Expenditure Shortfall

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what reasons account for the £12 million shortfall between planned and actual spending on capital building work in voluntary aided and special agreement schools in 1990-91; and whether he expects this shortfall to be repeated in 1991-92.

Mr. Fallon: The underspend of £12 million on total planned expenditure of £87 million 1990-91 resulted from the failure on the part of voluntary bodies and LEAs to spend up to the level allocated on a significant number of building projects. This resulted in an underspend of grant of some £10 million, which did, however, enable the Department to meet more requests for grant for external repairs to voluntary-aided schools therefore exceeding budget provision by some £7 million.

We hope to avoid a shortfall in 1991-92 by introducing the design list procedure whereby many of the named major projects have had preliminary plans approved and are therefore expected to progress according to schedule. None the less, the Department will be asking authorities to confirm current year expenditure plans in September so that any spare resources can be identified and reallocated.

Nuclear Structure Facility

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will instruct the Science and Engineering Research Council to issue a correction of its report, "The Laboratories in the 1990s", in the light of its proposal to close the nuclear structure facility.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Publication of this report, presented to the SERC in July 1990, was a matter for the SERC. It is for the council to consider whether, in due course, it wishes to publish an updated report taking account of developments since that date.

Braille (Examination Papers)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will discuss with examination boards the need for exam papers to be produced in braille;

(2) what information he has concerning the cost of individually and mass-producing examination papers in braille.

Mr. Eggar: Officials from the Department have had discussions about the braille needs of visually impaired examination candidates with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, with the secretaries of the GCE examining boards for A-level and AS-examinations, and with the Joint Council for the GCSE. Figures provided by these bodies suggest that the cost of translating an average length examination paper into braille lies between £240 and £480; significant savings are possible where the same paper is used by several candidates.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's policy on ensuring blind and partially sighted higher and further education students have adequate access to the examination process.

Mr. Eggar: The Government are concerned to ensure that students with disabilities, including those who are blind or partially sighted, should have equal access to further and higher education. It is a matter for individual institutions, in consultation as appropriate with qualification awarding bodies, to ensure that suitable arrangements are made for the assessment of individual students.

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the names and locations of all the AFRC establishments that have been closed since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The following AFRC research establishments have closed since 1979:

Letcombe Laboratory, Wantage
Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke, Oxford
Meat Research Institute, Bristol
Unit of Animal Genetics, Edinburgh
Unit of Invertebrate Chemistry and Physiology, Sussex
Unit of Muscle Mechanisms and Insect Physiology, Cambridge

The AFRC has also undertaken a programme of Institute restructuring which has involved some relocation of research establishments. This has been necessary to match the pace of scientific advance and opportunity and the shift in Government support from near-market to basic research. The concentration of AFRC's research base on to fewer sites will allow greater concentration of resources in its priority areas.

Funding to the AFRC from the science budget has increased by 37 per cent. in real terms since 1979. The AFRC continues to fund excellent work at the frontiers of science.

ENVIRONMENT

Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether schedule 5 of the Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 authorises a charge by a bailiff even where no visit has been made.

Mr. Portillo: No. Bailiffs cannot charge the debtor for work under schedule 5 of the Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 if no visit is made. However, that does not preclude the bailiffs' charging the local authority for any work they have undertaken.

London

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he takes to ensure that London's position is fully represented within the discussions that affect it within government.

Mr. Heseltine: I take all appropriate steps to ensure fair representation of London's interest. Within my Department I have a London regional office to advise me on matters directly affecting London and I consult widely, particularly with London boroughs, their associations and many other bodies with London-wide concerns.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the money raised by the uniform business rate in London is spent in London.

Mr. Key: In total local authorities in London received £1·5 billion from the non-domestic rates pool in 1990-91, and provisionally paid £2·7 billion into the pool during 1990-91. The latter figure does not represent the amounts of non-domestic rates raised from properties in London, because, first, properties on the central and Crown lists make payments direct to the non-domestic rates pool—it is not known how much of the total yield from these properties relates to London—and secondly, the provisional contribution made by local authorities to the non-domestic rates pool is calculated on the basis of the rateable value of properties on the local rating list as at 31 December 1989. Information about the actual rates payable in respect of 1990-91 is not likely to be available until November 1991.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the budget of each urban development corporation to cover the provision for training in each of the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The information is shown in the table.

UDC	*1989-90 £,000*	*1990-91 £,000*	*1991-92 £,000*
Black Country	150	400	900
Bristol	nil	nil	nil
C. Manchester	7	35	71
Leeds	5	23	25
London Docklands	2,400	3,300	2,200
Merseyside	315	315	260
Sheffield	58	67	100
Teesside	148	100	200
Trafford Park	22	184	446
Tyne and Wear	n/a	n/a	n/a

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish information giving details of the capital provided in the budget for all the urban development corporations for the provision of housing for the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The information is shown in the table.

UDC	*1989-90 £000*	*1990-91 £000*	*1991-92 £000*
Black Country	0	0	0
Bristol	0	0	0
Central Manchester	620	3,128	3,012
Leeds	0	0	0
London Docklands	51,000	19,500	0
Merseyside	0	0	50
Sheffield	0	0	0
Teesside	716	169	2,752
Trafford Park	0	0	0
Tyne and Wear	1,057	667	2,012

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the initiatives promoted by each of the urban development corporations to assist tourism since their inception.

Mr. Key: The UDCs' programmes include a wide variety of projects which help to promote tourism. Examples are:

the restoration of Albert dock in Liverpool;

support for local festivals, such as those held in Manchester and Wolverhampton;

visitor centres in Trafford Park and Teeside, and the Bede monastery museum in Jarrow;

environmental works to rivers, canals and pathways in many UDCs, including Sheffield and Bristol;

the London Docklands development corporation's six-year programme of funding for local tourist initiatives, including grants to local listed buildings such as St. Matthias church.

the development of hotel and leisure facilities in several UDCs.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of houses provided by each of the urban development corporations for each year of operation to 31 March.

Mr. Key: The available information is contained in the tables.

Housing units completed in UDC areas

	1981-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
London Docklands	[1]1,497	901	1,832	2,698

[1] Cumulative figure for 1981-84.

UDC	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Black Country	120	168	367[1]	289
Bristol	—	—	25	97
Central Manchester	—	140	115	173
Leeds	—	0	89	0
London Docklands	1,854	2,649	2,019	1,779
Merseyside	[1]339	233	206	282
Sheffield	—	0	0	0
Teesside	0	0	241	202
Trafford Park	—	0	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0	252	105

[1] Cumulative figure to 1987-88.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, South of 10 June, *Official Report*, column *385*, (1) what are the current arrangements with urban development corporations to fund the cost of unfinished projects;

(2) whether suitable arrangements for the winding up of uncompleted projects begun by urban development corporations will involve the Government's meeting the full cost of completion, or part of the cost.

Mr. Key: Arrangements have not yet been determined.

Community Charge

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list for each local authority the percentage of community charge uncollected at 31 March.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the cost would be of abolishing the minimum 20 per cent. contribution to the poll tax.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 27 June 1991 at column *519*.

District Council Newspapers

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department's library receives copies of the Basildon district council newspaper "Basildon Link" and Thurrock borough council newspaper "Thurrock Voice".

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Toxocara

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis his Department carries out on the presence of toxocara canis in soil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The matter of pet-borne infections is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. My Department has not carried out any research into the presence of toxocara canis in the soil.

Urban Development Initiative

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria were used to decide the recent list of cities to be included in the Government's new urban development initiative programme.

Mr. Key: City challenge is a new initiative through which local authorities are asked to provide local leadership for the regeneration of critical areas of their towns and cities. The authorities will bring together the relevant interests in their areas—the private sector, voluntary sector and local residents—to draw up plans for economic, social and environmental renewal. The initiative has been launched this year through a pilot scheme in which 15 authorities were invited to bid for 10 places as pacemaker authorities. Provided this pilot competition is successful, we intend there will be a full competition open to urban programme authorities in 1992.

The 15 authorities invited to participate in this year's pilot exercise were chosen to represent a wide range of circumstances across the country and for their ability to work up imaginative plans quickly.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether farmers in *(a)* environmentally sensitive areas and *(b)* national parks will be eligible for payment under the countryside stewardship scheme.

Mr. Trippier: Countryside stewardship payments will not be available where funding is available under the ESA scheme. However, the Countryside Commission may, at its discretion, agree payment in an ESA under the stewardship scheme for items not covered by the ESA scheme, for example access. The position is made clear in the scheme literature.

So far as national parks are concerned, farmers and other landowners and managers who have land within the landscape types targeted by the scheme may apply provided they are not receiving public funding already for work and management practices covered by the stewardship scheme.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the topics of each television advertising campaign to be carried out by his Department and any other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* My Department has no plans to use television advertising in any of its publicity work in the current financial year. We have two proposed publicity campaigns, which are estimated to cost more than £100,000. These are the joint campaign with the Department of Energy on the environment and home energy efficiency and a campaign to alert all businesses to the duty of care under section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Council Tax (Exemptions)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if those exempt from poll tax because of severe mental handicap will be exempted from the council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 2 July 1991]:* We have proposed that people who are severely mentally impaired should be entitled to personal discounts under the council tax if they would otherwise give rise to a higher bill for the property in which they live.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* My Department's policy, in respect of the relevant recommendations of the disability manifesto, is to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to participate fully in the life of the community. A major and continuing initiative is the introduction and implementation of building regulations aimed at making the built environment accessible to disabled people. On this and all other policy issues of concern to disabled people for which I have responsibility, my Department's practice is to consult with organisations representing disabled people.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 4 July.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place the official record of the briefing concerning immigration given on his behalf during the Luxembourg meetings of the European Council in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement I made in the House on 1 July, and the conclusions of the European Council, which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* The aim underlying the Government's policies for people with disabilities is to enable them to take a full part in the life of the community. Considerable progress has been made towards this goal over the past 12 years, and, while much remains to be done, we are continuing to build on these achievements.

This Government will continue to work towards enabling people with disabilities to live independently as far as possible, and to contribute fully to all aspects of the life of the community.

As the right hon. Member has asked similar questions of a number of my right hon. Friends, I have asked them to outline the major initiatives of their departmental programmes for people with disabilities.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the number of man hours spent in ADAS on *(a)* charged statutory work, *(b)* chargeable advice, *(c)* non-chargeable advice and *(d)* non-chargeable statutory work for each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: ADAS began charging for services generally on 1 April 1987. Information for the years 1986-87 and 1987-88 is not available in the form requested.

Information for the years 1988-89 to 1990-91 is as follows:

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
(a) Charged statutory work	109,074	88,911	108,032
(b) Chargeable advice	1,229,570	2,554,089	2,191,263
(c) Non-chargeable advice	137,705	477,948	560,003
(d) Non-chargeable statutory work	685,588	1,283,431	1,555,490

Notes:

(a) There have been structural changes in ADAS during this period. Figures are for ADAS as it was constituted at the time.
(b) Includes hours spent on work for MAFF/Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.
(c) Figures for 1989-90 onwards include directly attributable overheads—training, leave, management, and so on. Figures for 1988-89 exclude overheads.

Veterinary Investigation Centres

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the closure dates for each of the veterinary investigation centres which are due to be closed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The veterinary investigation centre at Wye will close on 31 July 1991; the Bangor centre will close on 30 September 1991. The closure dates for the Lincoln and Truro centres have not yet been finally decided. The Cambridge and Norwich centres will close when the new centre at Bury St. Edmunds is opened in 1993. The Worcester centre will close when the new centre in Warwickshire is opened in 1993. The Reading centre will close when the Winchester centre is enhanced and the new Warwickshire centre is opened in 1993.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the counties which fall into each currently operating veterinary investigation centres catchment area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The counties and areas covered by the national network of veterinary investigation centres in England and Wales are generally defined by county boundaries but there is however a degree of flexibility to

meet local requirements. The specific counties and other areas which form the catchment areas for the currently operating veterinary investigation centres in England and Wales are:

Bristol (Langford) VIC:
Avon, Somerset, Dorset and parts of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Gwent.

Cambridge VIC:
Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and parts of Greater London, Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire.

Lincoln VIC:
North Humberside, South Humberside, Lincolnshire and parts of Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Leicestershire and West Yorkshire.

Newcastle VIC:
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Cleveland.

Norwich VIC:
Norfolk and parts of Suffolk.

Penrith VIC:
Cumbria and parts of North Lancashire, Northumberland and West Yorkshire.

Preston (Barton Hall) VIC:
Lancashire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Isle of Man and parts of Yorkshire, Cumbria, Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

Reading VIC:
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Guernsey, Jersey and parts of Wiltshire, Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire, Middlesex, Greater London and Hertfordshire.

Shrewsbury VIC:
Shropshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands Metropolitan County and parts of Cheshire, Powys, Clwyd, Warwickshire and Derbyshire.

Starcross VIC:
Devon and parts of Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset.

Sutton Bonington VIC:
Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and parts of Staffordshire, South Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire.

Thirsk VIC:
North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and parts of South Yorkshire, North Humberside, Cleveland and County Durham.

Truro (Polwhele) VIC:
Cornwall, Isle of Scilly and parts of Devon.

Winchester VIC:
Hampshire, Isle of Wight, West Sussex and parts of Dorset, Wiltshire and Surrey.

Worcester VIC:
Hereford and Worcester, Warwickshire and parts of Gwent, Gloucestershire and West Midlands.

Wye VIC:
Kent, East Sussex and parts of Greater London, Surrey and West Sussex.

Aberystwyth VIC:
Powys and parts of Dyfed and Gwynedd.

Bangor VIC:
Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Carmarthen VIC:
Mid Glamorgan, West Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and parts of Dyfed, Powys and Gwent.

Countryside Premium Scheme

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to start administering the countryside premium scheme.

Mr. Curry: It is our intention to take over responsibility for the scheme and, subject to review and obtaining the necessary EC powers, extend it nationally. However, the final form and timing of adoption of the necessary EC proposals are uncertain.

North York Moors Farms

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the funding his Ministry has contributed to the North York Moors national park farm scheme in each of the last three years; what plans he has for the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: This scheme is financed through the usual funding arrangements for national parks in which my Department has no involvement. However, farmers participating in the scheme may also benefit from the farm and conservation grant scheme funded by my Department. The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service is also available to offer advice and assistance in furtherance of the aims of the scheme, which has my full support.

HEALTH

Breast Feeding

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information he has for 1990, for each social class of partner or husband, on the percentages of mothers who breastfed *(a)* initially and *(b)* when their baby had reached the age of six weeks;

(2) what information he has about the percentage of women breastfeeding their babies *(a)* initially and *(b)* at six weeks in 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information for 1990 is unlikely to be published before next year. The table sets out the information requested for the years 1975, 1980 and 1985 in England and Wales.

England and Wales

	1975 *Percentage*	*1980* *Percentage*	*1985* *Percentage*
Birth	51	67	65
Six weeks	24	42	40

Source: OPCS surveys.

In the recently published Green Paper "The Health of the Nation" we have proposed that we should aim to increase the rates of breast feeding at birth by 75 per cent. and six weeks by 50 per cent. by the year 2000.

Clinical Standards Advisory Group

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what *(a)* financial and *(b)* personal resources have been allocated to support the work of the clinical standards advisory group;

(2) how often the clinical standards advisory group has met;

(3) if he will make it his policy to publish an annual report on the work of the clinical standards advisory group;

(4) if he will make it his policy that work done by the clinical standards advisory group should be made available to the public;

(5) if he will make it his policy to publish a response to each report produced by the clinical standards advisory group;

(6) how often the clinical standards advisory group will publish its findings;

(7) if he will list the members of the clinical standards advisory group;

(8) what authority will be given to the clinical standards advisory group to initiate its own areas of work;

(9) when the Clinical Standards Advisory Group had its first meeting.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Clinical Standards Advisory Group comprises a chairman and 16 members as follows:

Dr. Gordon Higginson (Chairman)
Professor June Clark
Professor Roy Duckworth
Sir Terence English
Miss Pam Hibbs
Miss Jennifer Hunt
Miss Rosemary Jenkins
Miss Wilma Macpherson
Dr. Michael O'Brien
Professor Eurfil Rhys Davies
Professor John Richmond
Professor Michael Rosen
Mr. Derek Seel
Dr. Nuala Sterling
Professor Victor Tindall
Dr. Colin Waine
Professor Sir Dillwyn Williams

In addition, the General Medical Council, the General Dental Council, the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, the General Medical Services Committee and the Joint Consultants Committee have each nominated an observer to attend meetings.

Under section 62 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the CSAG will report to Health Ministers, and to NHS bodies, on the remits that each may give to the group. Health Ministers will normally publish reports made to them together with their responses. NHS bodies which commission work by the group will decide on the handling of the group's reports. Health Ministers will expect to receive and publish periodic overview reports from the group on its work at suitable intervals.

The CSAG has no statutory authority to initiate its own areas of work. However, Health Ministers will attach importance to the views of the group on the areas of work which they might be invited to cover. Health Ministers provide administrative and professional support to the CSAG from within their Departments. In 1991-92 £900,000 has been set aside to meet secretariat and other costs arising from the group's work.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the amounts allocated by each regional health authority in 1991-92 for the *(a)* training of managers in the national health service, *(b)* postgraduate medical education and *(c)* continuing medical education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 June at column *684*.

Occupational Therapy Service

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has issued guidance to health and local authorities on their responsibilities in providing an occupational therapy service in the community.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidance to health and local authorities on occupational therapy services was issued in 1985. There was further guidance in a 1988 health notice (HN(88)26), a copy of which is available in the Library, on the development of services for people with physical or sensory disabilities. A report by the social services inspectorate on local authority occupational therapy services is to be published shortly.

Chronic Sick and Disabled Units

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued to health authorities for the relocation of people being moved from young chronic sick and disabled units.

Mr. Dorrell: Health circular HC(89)5, a copy of which is available in the Library, on the discharge of patients from hospital was issued in February 1989 together with an explanatory booklet about procedures to be followed.

Dentures

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement on his policy regarding the direct provision to the public of dentures by denturists.

Mr. Dorrell: The General Dental Council may make regulations to establish classes of dental auxiliaries who may undertake dental work. These may not, however, permit auxiliaries to fit, insert or fix dentures or artificial teeth. It is considered that only registered dental or medical practitioners are competent to recognise pathological conditions which may be caused or exacerbated by dentures.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the planned reductions and planned increases in staff by each national health service trust from which he obtained the net figure of 200 which he gave in the debate on 14 May, *Official Report*, column 174, specifying the planning period in each case.

Mr. Waldegrave: No; as I said in the debate, many trusts are expanding and some are contracting. The prime responsibility of NHS trusts is to provide services and they will make their manpower plans in response to demand from health authorities and other purchasers. Therefore, the plans are likely to change over time.

Neonatal Intensive Care

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each region and for England as a whole the number of neonatal intensive care cots.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 15 October 1990 at columns *667-74*. We expect figures for 1990-91 to be completed by the end of September.

Ativan

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of prescriptions of Ativan in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Great Britain
Number of prescriptions
(thousands)

Drug name	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Tab Lorazepam 2pt5mg	332·9	429·1	382·0	255·7	212·9
Tab Lorazepam 1mg	2,148·5	2,719·1	2,519·6	1,867·0	1,529·3
Ativan Tab 2pt5mg	92·7	0·2	—	—	—
Ativan Tab 1mg	543·1	0·5	0·1	—	—

Note:
1. Ativan was included in a list of drugs not prescribable at NHS expense from April 1985. However, its generic form, Lorazepam, remains prescribable.
2. These figures are based on a sample of dispensed prescriptions of approximately 1 in 200 in England and Wales and 1 in 100 in Scotland.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans or proposals he has for merging or re-organising the district health authorities in Greater London.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* We have no plans to reorganise health authorities. Any proposal to merge district health authorities in London or elsewhere is a matter for the regional health authority concerned. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear to regional health authorities that consultation on any such proposals has to be wide and that Ministers need to be convinced that they are in the interests of local people and of the national health service generally.

WALES

Blue Ear Pig Disease

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is undertaking to prevent the spread of blue ear pig disease into Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Blue Ear Pig Disease Order 1991 was introduced in June. This order makes suspicion of the disease notifiable, allows for the declaration of infected places and infected areas by special orders and allows movement restrictions to be placed on premises exposed to infection pending a veterinary investigation.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the average knacker charge for the collection of *(a)* bovine casualties and *(b)* ruminant casualties in each year from 1979 onwards on the basis of 1989-90 prices in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The charging by knackers for the removal of carcases is a comparatively recent development resulting from changes in the market for animal by-products. Details of these charges are not available in the form requested, but is understood that the current average ranges of charges in Wales are as follows:

	£
Adult cattle	10-30
Calves	2-5
Sheep	4-8

Birth Statistics

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for 1990 for the residents of *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each NHS district within Wales (i) the number of live births (ii) the percentage of live births with unstated birth weight (iii) the number of live births with stated birth weight and (iv) the percentages of these, which were under 1000g, 1000g to 1499g, 1500g to 1999g, 2000g to 2499g, 2500g to 2999g, 3000g to 3499g, 3500g to 3999g and 4000g and above.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is given in the table and is derived from all registered births to residents of Wales:

District health authority	*All live births*			*Live births (with birthweight stated) by birthweight*							
	Number	*Percentage with birthweight not stated*	*Total (birthweight stated)*	*<1000g (per cent.)*	*1000-1499g (per cent.)*	*1500-1999g (per cent.)*	*2000-2499g (per cent.)*	*2500-2999g (per cent.)*	*3000-3499g (per cent.)*	*3500-3999g (per cent.)*	*4000g and over (per cent.)*
Clwyd	5,352	2·2	5,237	0·3	0·6	1·6	4·1	16·1	35·1	30·1	12·2
East Dyfed	2,723	4·1	2,616	0·3	0·5	1·0	3·5	15·1	37·5	30·8	11·3
Pembrokeshire	1,435	0·4	1,429	0·2	0·6	1·0	4·0	15·5	37·6	29·4	11·8
Gwent	6,404	6·7	6,004	0·2	0·5	1·3	4·9	18·1	36·2	29·3	9·5
Gwynedd	3,027	5·0	2,883	0·2	0·4	1·2	4·2	14·5	37·4	28·7	13·3
Mid Glamorgan	7,812	1·1	7,730	0·4	0·6	1·2	4·0	17·7	36·2	29·2	10·7
Powys	1,472	6·9	1,377	0·1	0·7	0·9	3·8	14·6	38·1	31·2	10·7
South Glamorgan	5,868	0·7	5,830	0·4	0·6	1·1	3·9	17·0	38·6	27·9	10·4
West Glamorgan	4,773	7·6	4,434	0·2	0·7	1·1	4·1	14·6	36·7	30·4	12·3
Wales	38,866	3·5	37,540	0·3	0·6	1·2	4·1	16·4	36·8	29·4	11·1

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

A44

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to improve the trunk road A44 between Rhydlydan and Llwynhowel, Ponterwyd Sir Aberteifi within the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have no plans to carry out improvement to the A44 in that area to that time scale.

Employment Training

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many adults with learning difficulties were undertaking employment training in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many are in training in the current year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not available.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of employment training placements for the last available financial year were in workplaces with employers; and what percentage were in project-based schemes.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The estimated percentages of ET participants on placements with employers and with projects as at 31 March 1991 were 27 and 28 per cent. respectively. Financial year information is not available.

Earnings

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the distribution of gross weekly earnings of full-time persons in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* the counties of Gwynedd, Clwyd, Powys and Dyfed, *(c)* the administrative district of Snowdonia national park and *(d)* the district of Meirionnydd as at April 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest available information, for April 1990, relating to the distribution of gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was not affected by absence, is given in the table:

Male and Female	*Average gross weekly earnings*	*Distribution of weekly earnings percentage earning under:*		
		£180	*£250*	*£320*
Wales	232·1	38·0	64·3	83·6
Gwynedd, Clwyd, Powys and Dyfed[1]	227·7	40·1	65·6	84·6
Gwynedd[2]	225·5	44·6	64·9	83·8
Meirionnydd district	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = Not available.
Source: New Earnings Survey.
[1] Excluding Llanelli district.
[2] Separate figures for the national park area are not available.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average gross weekly earnings as at April 1991 of male and female full-time employees by industry (sic 1980 class) in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwynedd, Clwyd, Powys and Dyfed, *(c)* the administrative district of Snowdonia national park and *(d)* the district of Meirionnydd.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest available information by industry—standard industrial classification classes—is published in part E of the new earnings survey 1990—tables 118-121—a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Because figures for Wales are derived from a sample of full-time employees, details for some industry classes are not sufficiently reliable for publication.

There are no reliable figures by industry class for the other areas of Wales requested but the average earnings of all make and all female full-time employees in April 1990 are, where available, given in the table:

Average gross weekly earnings:
Full-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence

	Male	*Female*
Wales	258·6	180·3
Gwynedd, Clwyd, Powys and Dyfed[1]	253·9	178·1
Gwynedd[2]	248·4	175·7
Meirionnydd district	n.a.	n.a.

[1] Excluding Llanelli district.
[2] Separate figures for the national park area are not available.

Trawsfynydd Lake

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will identify the means and routes by which radioactivity has entered Trawsfynydd lake, giving comparable information for other bodies of water that are not directly connected with discharges from the Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, and account for the presence of natural radioactivity, past fall-out from Chernobyl and other nuclear-related incidents that have resulted in airborne radioactive matter entering Trawsfynydd lake; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will provide the results of any analysis undertaken by or reported to his office on the increased radiation dose, whole body and internal organs, received by the most exposed members of the public as a result of the water level of Trawsfynydd lake being lowered for investigation repairs to the dam serving to contain the waters of the lake; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will provide the level of radioactivity currently in situ in the sediments of lake Trawsfynydd, and the proportions of the overall radioactive inventory contributed by each principal radionuclide specie, stating how each radionuclide specie is distributed across the lake bottom and through the sediment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* The directorate of fisheries research of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food monitors regularly the levels of any radioactivity found in environmental materials taken from Lake Trawsfynydd. Measurements

are also made in other lakes. The results are published in the annual reports of monitoring of radioactivity in surface and coastal waters of the British Isles. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

The regular monitoring reports include analysis of the measurements in terms of both internal and external radiation doses. There is no evidence of any increase of dose to members of the public which is attributable to the lowering of the water level in the lake.

Radioactive nuclides are regularly monitored in Lake Trawsfynydd sediments and the results published in the annual reports. More detailed investigations into the radionuclide content of sediment profiles are currently being undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the results will be published.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration his Department has given to the radiological consequenced to individual members of the public of allowing the Trawsfynydd lake to be completely drained and/or abandons when the present nuclear power station located on its shores ceases to function; what conclusions he has reached in terms of the most exposed individual of the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* When Trawsfynydd power station is to be decommissioned, full account will be taken of potential radiation exposure to members of the public from such operations. However, the presence of the recently refurbished Maentwrog hydroelectric power station will ensure the need to maintain the lake for many years to come.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the period for which the level of the lake was lowered in order to facilitate investigation and repairs to the dam containing the waters of Trawsfynydd lake, and state by how much, on average, the level of the lake was lowered and by what extent in area lake bottom sediments were exposed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* I understand from Nuclear Electric that Trawsfynydd lake level was lowered in December 1986 from a nominal maximum of 650 ft above mean sea level—AMSL—to a nominal maximum of 642 ft AMSL to aid investigative work on the main dam structure. The level rose during early 1987 but was again reduced to 644 ft AMSL nominal maximum in May 1987 to relieve pressure on the dam structure until the new dam is completed, which is expected to be later this year.

When the lake's maximum level is lowered, areas of the lake shore which are normally covered by water, except during the summer months, are uncovered for longer periods. The size of these exposed areas varies from one part of the lake to another, depending on the slope of the shore at any point.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which organisation is to be responsible for maintaining Trawsfynydd lake at the desired levels and in good repair in future years; for how long the lake will have to be maintained full and in good repair if any undesirable radiation exposure to any member of the public is to be avoided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* Nuclear Electric owns the lake and is responsible for maintaining it at the required level. I understand that the primary purpose of the lake is to provide water for the Maentwrog hydro-electric scheme.

If at any time the draining of the lake is proposed, a full assessment of any potential radiological consequences will be made beforehand so that all necessary measures can be taken, including those required to ensure public safety.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if water run off from Trawsfynydd lake enters any source of potable water supplies.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* There are no licensed potable water abstractions from Trawsfynydd lake or the Afon Prysor into which it discharges. However, records are not kept of single abstractions of less than 5 cu m or of abstractions by adjoining land owners which are permitted without licence.

SCOTLAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many reported cases of BSE there have been in each of the last six months; how many cattle have been killed; and from what number of farms in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information for Scotland for each of the last six available months is as follows:

	Number reported	*Number slaughtered*	*Number of farms*
December 1990	43	40	39
January 1991	76	72	65
February 1991	67	58	53
March 1991	73	59	59
April 1991	59	53	50
May 1991	48	30	28

The number of farms relates to animals slaughtered. Animals reported as suspected of being affected with the disease are normally held for a time for surveillance before slaughter. Final confirmation cannot be obtained until histopathological examination of brain tissues has been completed after death.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing expenditure on *(a)* hospital and community health services, *(b)* family health services and *(c)* total health service spending, identifying current and capital expenditure separately and adjusted for changes in input unit costs in each year from 1978-79 to the most recent available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 June 1991]:* Details of gross expenditure for Scotland broken down by service from 1978-79 to 1989-90, in cash terms, and adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator, are given in the tables.

(a) Hospital and Community Health Services

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1990-91 prices*
Current Expenditure		
1978-79	627	1,582
1979-80	749	1,619
1980-81	964	1,761
1981-82	1,083	1,805
1982-83	1,156	1,798
1983-84	1,227	1,825
1984-85	1,306	1,848
1985-86	1,381	1,854
1986-87	1,465	1,900
987-88	1,598	1,968
1988-89	1,776	2,036
1989-90	1,906	2,054
Capital Expenditure		
1978-79	51	129
1979-80	58	125
1980-81	59	108
1981-82	84	140
1982-83	92	143
1983-84	99	147
1984-85	107	151
1985-86	120	161
1986-87	115	149
1987-88	117	144
1988-89	128	147
1989-90	170	183

(b) Family Health Services (Current)

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the DPG deflator to 1990-91 prices*
1978-79	167	421
1979-80	197	426
1980-81	246	449
1981-82	281	468
1982-83	322	501
1983-84	349	519
1984-85	382	541
1985-86	402	540
1986-87	440	571
1987-88	485	597
1988-89	545	625
1989-90	583	628

(c) Total National Health Expenditure

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1990-91 prices*
Current		
1978-79	837	2,112
1979-80	999	2,159
1980-81	1,276	2,331
1981-82	1,436	2,392
1982-83	1,556	2,421
1983-84	1,665	2,475
1984-85	1,782	2,521
1985-86	1,882	2,525
1986-87	2,017	2,616
1987-88	2,199	2,708
1988-89	2,449	2,807
1989-90	2,633	2,837
Capital		
1978-79	56	141
1979-80	65	141
1980-81	67	123
1981-82	95	159
1982-83	104	162
1983-84	108	161
1984-85	119	169
1985-86	132	178
1986-87	126	164
1987-88	129	159
1988-89	142	163
1989-90	187	202

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to investigate *(a)* the uptake of family credit by the self-employed,

(b) the administration of the family credit scheme so far as self-employed claimants are involved and *(c)* the use of cash flow on the method of determining earnings.

Mr. Jack: There are around 47,000 families on family credit where the main earner is self-employed. Nearly 45 per cent. of them receive family credit of £50 or more a week. To improve further the service to self-employed customers, and to respond to the representations made by them and on their behalf, the Department has commissioned a research study into family credit for the self-employed from the social policy research unit at the university of York. The study is looking not only at the administration of the scheme and the method of determining earnings, but at a wide range of other matters including the nature of low income self-employment; incentives to work and job creation; eligibility and factors affecting take-up of family credit; and standards of living. The full report of the study is not due until 1993, but we hope to receive information on the assessment and administration elements before the end of this year.

Johnstone Benefits Office

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent in the Johnstone office of the Benefits Agency on *(a)* floor coverings, *(b)* furnishings and *(c)* fabric improvements in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Expenditure incurred by this Department since 1985 has been as follows:

	Floor coverings	*Furnishings*	*Fabric improvements (internal redecoration)*
	£	£	£
1985-86	Nil	Nil	Nil
1986-87	Nil	Nil	Nil
1987-88	Nil	Nil	Nil
1988-89	Nil	Nil	9,200
1989-90	21,500	26,451	1,000
1990-91	Nil	12,021	Nil

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on extending or improving the Johnstone office of the Benefits Agency in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Information for the years prior to 1985-86 is not readily available.

The amounts spent by this Department on extending or improving the Johnstone office of the Benefits Agency in each of the financial years since 1985-86 are:

	£
1985-86	1,821
1986-87	734
1987-88	3,501
1988-89	1,084
1989-90	48,998
1990-91	17,048

Notes:

1. Figures prior to April 1988 do not include any works projects over £2,500, which were the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.
2. These figures do not include the amounts spent on floor coverings, furnishings and fabric improvements.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the total population eligible to use the Johnstone office of the Benefits Agency in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many claimants were dealt with from the Johnstone office of the Benefits Agency in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is the effect of the Benefits Agency review on the operation of its office in Johnstone; what amendments to its operations have been made; what future proposals are intended for implementation; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Statistics were obtained from the Strathclyde regional council to aid service planning and give the projected population of the Renfrew district, considered to be the most relevant.

In 1986 the actual figure was 203,220 with a projected change to 201,258, 200,805, 200,391, 200,008 and 199,644 in the years 1987 to 1991. The figures for 1985 are not available.

It is impossible to say how many customers are dealt with by any office of the Benefits Agency in any year. Contact can be made by post, by telephone or by visit and detailed figures are not held. The table, covering the main benefits, gives an indication of the numbers in contact with the Johnstone office over the period. Figures prior to 1987 are not available.

	Income support			
	Income support claims	*Social fund application*	*Income support load*	*Income support/ Social fund callers*
April 1987-88	7,680	18,534	7,996	Not available
April 1988-89	6,632	17,812	7,265	4,355
April 1989-90	6,749	17,489	7,166	5,332
April 1990-91	5,527	23,519	7,010	5,732

Contributory benefits

	Short-term benefit/ Maternity benefit claims	*Retirement pension/ Widow's pension claims*	*Short-term benefits load (average)*	*Contributory benefit callers*
April 1987-88	2,071	971	3,915	15,569
April 1988-89	1,938	900	3,944	14,962
April 1989-90	2,045	1,001	4,303	14,725
April 1990-91	2,156	862	4,837	15,997

With the formation of the Benefits Agency, Paisley ILO and Johnstone ILO—previously separately managed independent units—were combined to form the Renfrew district. Currently at Johnstone are income support, liable relatives, direct payment, overpayments, social fund crisis loans and part of finance sections.

Future proposals are the responsibility of Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefits (Wales)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals were in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* income support and income support premiums, *(c)* family credit, *(d)* national insurance retirement pensions, *(e)* supplementary benefit, *(f)* child benefit and *(g)* one parent benefit; and what were the average payments made in (i) Wales, (ii) the administrative districts of Gwynedd, Clwyd, Powys and Dyfed, (iii) the administrative district of Snowdonia national park and (iv) the district of Meirionnydd during the past 12 months.

Miss Widdecombe: The complete answer to this question is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs. This is because such statistics are collected at DSS and unemployment benefit office level and areas covered by these offices do not correspond to the administrative districts specified. Furthermore, the information that is routinely collected does not reflect the number of individuals in receipt during particular periods, it merely provides a "snapshot" of a given point in time.

Such information as is available and relates to Wales follows:

(a) Unemployment Benefit; in May 1991, there were 28,610 individuals in receipt.
(b) Income Support and Income Support Premiums; in May 1989, there were 246,000 customers in receipt of whom 169,000 were in receipt of one or more premiums. The average payment was £34·83
(c) Family Credit; in November 1990, there were 21,300 persons in receipt. The average payment was £31·02.
(d) Retirement Pension; in April 1990 there were 518,000 in receipt.
(e) Supplementary Benefits; no customers in receipt of a weekly allowance
(f) Child Benefit; in 1989, there were 348,000 persons in receipt. The average weekly payment was £13·94.
(g) One Parent Benefit; in December 1989, there were 34,000 persons in receipt. The average weekly payment was £5·60.

Disability Benefit Regulations

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether any disability benefit regulations will be laid before the summer adjournment.

Mr. Scott: As the first step in a further consultation process on the new disability benefits I have today laid before the House draft regulations to provide for the new Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board. This new body will provide expert advice to staff working on disability living allowance and attendance allowance, which will remain for people disabled over age 65. The membership of the board will comprise people with disabilities and others with experience in the needs of disabled people and we will be inviting organisations of and for disabled people to make suggestions for its membership.

Over the next few weeks we shall also be issuing for comments the draft claim forms for disability living allowance and disability working allowance and the regulations which set out how the new benefits will operate in detail. We shall also be issuing the draft disability handbook which will assist the staff working on disability living allowance, and the draft regulations for the two benefits.

As part of this strategy of consulting disabled people about the administration of benefits we have conducted a survey of consumer views of the attendance allowance medical examination. The report of this survey, which shows a high level of satisfaction with the service provided by examining doctors will be published next week.

We have also laid before the House today a set of regulations to enable members of Her Majesty's forces to satisfy the residence test for severe disablement allowance.

Finally, we plan to lay regulations before the end of the parliamentary Session to introduce some beneficial changes to the industrial injuries provisions. We shall be extending the prescription for occupational asthma and adding two new diseases, orf and hydatidosis, to the schedule of prescribed diseases.

EMPLOYMENT

Racial Discrimination

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on racial discrimination in employment.

Mr. Jackson: The Government are resolutely opposed to racial discrimination and sees fair treatment between citizens regardless of race as fundamental to a healthy and balanced society. Racial discrimination is morally wrong. Moreover, in employment it makes bad business sense by potentially excluding the best person for the job.

Progress has been made in eliminating racial discrimination. In that period from 1984 the unemployment rates for ethnic minorities came down faster than those for white people. There is also evidence that ethnic minority people have moved into higher level occupations over the past 20 years, and there has been a steady increase

in the number of ethnic minority people taking up the challenge and opportunities of self-employment. However, more remains to be done to achieve equal opportunities in employment for these groups.

The Race Relations Act 1976, which applies to Great Britain, provides the legislative framework for the elimination of racial discrimination. The Commission for Racial Equality works to this end and has published a code of practice in employment.

The Department—through the employment service and training and enterprise councils—seeks to ensure equality of opportunity, irrespective of race, in all its programmes and services. In addition, the Department's race relations employment advisory service provides advice and guidance to employers on the introduction and implementation of policies and practices aimed at eliminating racial discrimination in employment.

Independent Unions Training Council

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will classify the Independent Unions Training Council as an appropriate body to approve training under paragraph 17 of the ACAS code of practice—time off for trade union duties and activities; and whether he has any plans to include the Independent Unions Training Council in paragraph 17 of subsequent editions of the code.

Mr. Forth: Paragraph 17 of the ACAS code of practice "Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities" consists of a restatement of statutory provisions contained in section 27 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for ACAS to amend its code of practice in the manner suggested. The Government have no present plans to amend the relevant legislation.

Employment Training

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many adults with learning difficulties were undertaking employment training in each of the last five years; and how many are in training in the current year.

Mr. Jackson: While information is available about the overall number of trainees with disabilities entering employment training, information is not collected separately about those with learning difficulties.

Astra Training Services

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of whether Astra Training Services Ltd. has carried out all its statutory obligations and formal undertakings to trainees and employees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: At the point of sale the Government met their undertakings to ensure that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 applied to former civil servants who transferred to the private sector, including Astra and that pension arrangements were satisfactorily covered. Astra Training Services Ltd. is now a private company and it, and not the Government, is responsible for such statutory or other obligations that fall on it.

Food Industry

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of people employed in the food industry by county on the latest available date for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: The most recent estimates of employees in employment according to industry and by county are from the September1989 census of employment. Data for the food industries are given in the table.

Employees in Employment in the Food Industries, September 1989, by County

Thousands

	Industries (Groups of SIC 1980)		
	Food	*Food Distribution*	
	Manufacturing SIC Groups 411 to 423	*Retail SIC Group 617*	*Wholesale[2] SIC Group 641*
South East			
Bedfordshire	3·6	5·4	2·0
Berkshire	5·1	9·4	3·4
Buckinghamshire	2·7	6·9	2·3
East Sussex	3·0	8·4	2·9
Essex	5·1	19·8	5·1
Greater London	34·5	74·9	34·2
Hampshire[1] / Isle of Wight[1]	8·1	22·4	6·1
Hertfordshire	4·5	16·6	4·5
Kent	5·9	18·8	6·9
Oxfordshire	6·4	8·2	1·9
Surrey	2·5	13·1	4·5
West Sussex	3·2	8·9	1·8
East Anglia			
Cambridgeshire	7·0	7·8	3·2
Norfolk	12·4	8·9	5·3
Suffolk	13·7	8·5	3·1
South West			
Avon	6·1	14·4	6·6
Cornwall	2·2	5·4	2·5
Devon	6·6	11·3	5·6
Dorset	4·1	8·4	1·7
Gloucestershire	3·8	6·6	1·4

Thousands

	Industries (Groups of SIC 1980)		
	Food	*Food Distribution*	
	Manufacturing SIC Groups 411 to 423	*Retail SIC Group 617*	*Wholesale[2] SIC Group 641*
Somerset	5·1	5·7	2·2
Wiltshire	6·5	7·4	2·4
West Midlands			
Hereford and Worcester	7·3	7·5	2·5
Shropshire	4·3	5·0	1·9
Staffordshire	8·4	10·5	3·2
Warwickshire	2·7	6·0	1·4
West Midlands	13·5	26·3	10·5
East Midlands			
Derbyshire	6·9	9·8	2·6
Leicestershire	9·9	9·4	3·9
Lincolnshire	12·0	7·5	4·2
Northamptonshire	7·7	7·2	3·5
Nottinghamshire	7·8	11·7	4·5
Yorkshire and Humberside			
Humberside	17·8	11·8	6·8
North Yorkshire	14·8	9·1	2·4
South Yorkshire	10·5	13·1	5·5
West Yorkshire	21·1	24·0	8·4
North West			
Cheshire	8·3	12·2	4·3
Greater Manchester	27·0	25·5	10·8
Lancashire	13·6	15·3	6·2
Merseyside	14·5	12·8	5·2
North			
Cleveland	4·2	5·4	1·0
Cumbria	7·6	6·3	0·9
Durham[1] / Northumberland[1]	4·6	8·2	1·7
Tyne and Wear	4·9	12·7	3·6
Wales			
Clwyd	4·2	6·1	1·0
Dyfed	1·6	3·7	1·3
Gwent	3·8	5·2	1·0
Gwynedd	1·6	3·4	0·8
Mid-Glamorgan[1] / Powys[1]	4·5	7·2	1·6
South Glamorgan	2·0	5·1	1·9
West Glamorgan	1·5	4·3	1·1
Scotland (Regions)			
Borders[1] / Dumfries and Galloway[1]	4·2	3·6	0·7
Central[1] / Fife[1]	1·9	8·2	1·1
Grampian	10·7	7·6	3·5
Highlands	1·3	3·1	0·9
Lothian	8·1	9·6	4·4
Strathclyde	18·3	27·4	8·5
Tayside	4·3	6·0	2·1
Islands	0·7	0·9	0·4

[1] Figures for these two counties are combined to avoid disclosure, directly or indirectly, of information concerning an individual firm.
[2] Includes the wholesale distribution of drink and tobacco.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the outcome of the meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council held in Luxembourg on 25 and 26 June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Council had a useful and productive meeting. On the first day, the Council formally adopted its common position on the directive concerned with the health and safety of temporary workers and a directive to control the use of asbestos in the workplace.

Agreement was reached on an amendment to a regulation on social security arrangements for migrant workers; on a decision relating to the PETRA programme concerning vocational training exchanges for young people; on a directive concerning the provision of medical assistance on board ships; and on a decision on the European Year of Health and Safety.

Agreement in principle was also reached on a proposed directive on proof of employment relationships. Formal adoption was not possible since the European Parliament had failed to deliver its opinion in time for the Council.

A regulation to bring forward by one year to 31 December 1991 the full free movement of workers between Spain and Portugal and the rest of the Community was also adopted.

There was a protracted discussion, in which divergent views were expressed by a large number of member states,

on one article of the proposed directive on the protection of pregnant women at work, but no agreement was reached. Almost all member states continue to have serious concerns on many aspects of the substance of this proposal.

Contrary to a number of inaccurate newspaper and broadcast reports, there was no discussion of the proposed directive on working time.

On the second day dealing with youth affairs, when my noble Friend Viscount Ullswater represented the United Kingdom, the Council agreed a decision on the Youth for Europe programme and a resolution on priority action in the field of youth.

Overall, the outcome of the proceedings demonstrated once again that the United Kingdom is far from isolated on even those proposals under the social action programme which cause us the most difficulty. Many member states are now experiencing difficulties and are working to keep important and sensitive areas of employment and social policy within the bounds of national law and practice. It is to be hoped that the Commission will take heed of these developments and concentrate its efforts on bringing forward proposals which will increase employment and reduce burdens on business.

The meeting also showed that the present treaty is perfectly adequate to enable sensible progress to be made in those areas where the Community has a proper role.

To date the Council has reached a decision on eight of the 19 social action programme measures so far submitted by the Commission.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltic States

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of attacks by units of the Soviet armed forces and Ministry of the Interior troops on targets in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in May and June; and if he will make representations to the Soviet authorities to withdraw all armed forces from the Baltic republics.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received several accounts of these attacks from our embassy and other sources. We have left the Soviet authorities in no doubt of our strong feelings about them. In the conclusions of its meeting at Luxembourg on 29 June, the European Council expressed its deep concern at the continued acts of intimidation and violence which had taken place in the Baltic states since the events in January, most recently in Vilnius on 26 June. The Council appealed for serious negotiations to be engaged between the Soviet authorities and the three Baltic states to find a solution which would fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Baltic peoples.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to provide the Government of Gibraltar with all EC documents on which future directives or other legislation will be based; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: It is already our policy to provide Gibraltar with all EC documents relevant to Gibraltar's status within the Community.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Iraqi Refugees

8. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi refugees are presently living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Around 700 Iraqi nationals, including associated dependants, have been recognised as refugees in the United Kingdom since 1979. Corresponding information for earlier years is not available.

Immigration

14. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the Government's policies towards immigration.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The basic principles of the Government's immigration policy remain to maintain a firm and fair immigration control which restricts the numbers coming to work or settle here from outside the European Community.

Independent Television Franchises

15. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the outcome of applications for Channel 3 licences; and if he will make a statement.

25. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the outcome of applications for Channel 3 licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It will be the Independent Television Commission, and not my right hon. Friend, which announces the outcome of applications for Channel 3 licences. I understand that it hopes to make such an announcement no later than October this year.

Uniform Business Rate

16. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were jailed for non-payment of uniform business rate in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police Authorities (Yorkshire)

17. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit Yorkshire to discuss the funding of the police authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have no plans to visit Yorkshire to discuss police funding.

Youth Crime Prevention Panels

18. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many junior crime prevention panels have been set up in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of December 1990 there were 352 youth crime prevention panels in England and Wales, an increase of 91 over the previous 12 months.

Regional Television Companies

19. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the percentage of the profits of regional television companies which are taken in levy payments.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Based on figures supplied by the ITC, which is statutorily responsible for collecting the ITV levy, it is estimated that for the 1990 calendar year the levy payable by ITV companies, including TV-am, will amount to .52 per cent. of gross profits.

Guns

20. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate another review of the gun licence laws.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Firearms Consultative Committee is required to keep the Firearms Acts under review. If it thinks fit, it may make recommendations to my right hon. Friend for their amendment.

Dog Control

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he plans to take to ensure existing and future dog control legislation is enforced by the police.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have discussed the measures in the Dangerous Dogs Bill with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Metropolitan police, who support the action that the Government are taking to tackle the problem of dangerous dogs. We shall issue guidance to the police on enforcement of the legislation when it is enacted.

Identity Cards

22. **Sir John Hunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent consideration he has given to the introduction of identity cards for the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: In its report on practical police co-operation in the EC, the Home Affairs Committee recommended the introduction of a voluntary system of identity cards. In responding in January 1991, the Government said that the public demand for a voluntary identity card, and the benefits it would confer on the community, would not be commensurate with the high cost of developing and maintaining such a system. None the less, I shall continue to keep this question under review in the light of relevant developments.

West Midlands Serious Crime Squad

23. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to have prepared a report on the lessons to be learnt from the disbandment of the West Midlands serious crime squad.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A full investigation of the handling of cases by the former serious crime squad of the West Midlands police is being undertaken. It is for the Police Complaints Authority to decide whether matters that have come to its notice as a result of the investigation, should be made public or should be drawn to my right hon. Friend's attention by way of a report under section 97(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Police Federation

24. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet the executive of the Police Federation to discuss recent rises in the level of crime.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend meets the executive of the Police Federation regularly to discuss a wide range of policing matters, including the level of crime.

Fire Services (Northolt and Greenford)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the appropriate level of firefighting facilities and staff in the Northolt and Greenford area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals he has received for the reduction of the number of fire engines at Northolt fire station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the London fire and civil defence authority to assess the resources necessary to meet efficiently the fire risks in the Northolt and Greenford area. Any proposals to reduce the numbers of operational firefighters or firefighting appliances—and we have received none from the authority—would require my right hon. Friend's approval under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. In deciding whether to grant it, we should want to be satisfied that the London fire and civil defence authority would continue to be able to meet the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover.

Sexual and Physical Violence

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how women victims of sexual and physical violence are encouraged to report the offence to the police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Police procedures and facilities for the reception and treatment of victims of physical and sexual violence have improved greatly in recent years. We believe that the increase in reported rape over the same period is in part attributable to changes in police practice in this respect. In the light of recent Home Office guidance, many forces are now taking practical steps to provide a better service to victims of domestic violence, with a view to encouraging more women to report such incidents to them.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines there are on how victims of sexual and physical abuse should be treated by the police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office guidance to the police on the treatment of victims of rape and domestic violence was issued in 1986. A revised and expanded circular on domestic violence was produced in July 1990. Additional guidance for the police on the investigation of child sexual abuse will be issued in conjunction with the Department of Health's revised "Working Together" in the autumn. Copies of the current guidance are in the Library.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how data on women victims of sexual and physical abuse are collected; and how it is made available.

Mr. John Patten: Statistics of recorded violent offences are collected by the police and published quarterly in a Home Office statistical bulletin and annually in Chapter 2 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales". More detailed information on women victims of physical and sexual abuse is not collected on a regular basis but ad hoc analysis of police statistics, the British crime survey and other research studies classify offences by gender of victim. This information is made available either in ad hoc statistical bulletins such as Issue 29/80 "Violent Crime: Characteristics of victims and circumstances of recorded offences 1984", or in Home Office Research Studies such as "Personal Violence" HORS 89,"Changes in Rape Offences and Sentencing" HORS 105, "Concerns about Rape" Hors 106 and "Domestic Violence" HORS 107. Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Political Asylum

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the numbers of people seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom; and what further action he proposes to announce to control such immigration.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend made a statement on asylum on 2 July at columns 165-67.

Immigration (Caribbean)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of *(a)* Trinidad and Tobago, *(b)* Guyana, *(c)* Barbados and *(c)* Jamaica have (i) been admitted and (ii) refused admittance and removed each month during the period November 1990 to March 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is given in the table.

Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Barbados and Jamaica admitted to, and refused leave to enter and removed from, the United Kingdom.

	1990		1991		
	November	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Trinidad and Tobago					
Total admitted[1]	1,150	1,230	1,100	800	1,100
Total refused leave to enter and removed	10	8	7	13	7
Guyana					
Total admitted[1]	400	400	300	300	400
Total refused leave to enter and removed	5	8	3	4	6
Barbados					
Total admitted[1]	400	400	400	300	400
Total refused leave to enter and removed	2	5	5	3	2
Jamaica					
Total admitted[1]	1,900	2,080	1,700	1,300	1,700
Total refused leave to enter and removed	52	33	33	32	37

[1] The data for January to March 1991 are provisional.

Thames Valley Police

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on future manning levels in the Thames Valley police force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend announced on 20 December 1990 an additional 40 police posts for Thames Valley with effect from 1 October 1991.

The police authority has also made an application for an additional 132 police posts for 1992-93. My right hon. Friend hopes to make a decision before the end of the year.

May Inquiry

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects Sir John May to resume his inquiry into the conviction of innocent people for the Guildford and Woolwich bombings.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand that Sir John May will resume his inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the convictions of the Guildford and Woolwich defendants as soon as any proceedings against officers of the Surrey police force have been concluded. I further understand that Sir John intends holding further public hearings into the Maguire case in September.

Drug Initiative Teams

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made on the establishment of drug initiative teams.

Mr. John Patten: Twelve local drugs prevention teams are in action under the Government's drugs prevention initiative, including one in Wolverhampton. Four further teams are in the process of being appointed or recruited. Discussions with local agencies in another four areas are taking place about the arrangements for setting up teams in those areas.

Broadcasting Regulation

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the BBC to discuss the regulation of the broadcasting industry.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend meets the Chairman of the BBC from time to time in order to discuss a wide range of broadcasting issues. The last occasion was in May.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Passes

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will publish a list of the several categories of Palace of Westminster pass, showing the capacities for which each category applies, together with *(a)* the number of such passes in issue at the latest convenient date and *(b)* the total number of such passes in issue at any time in the latest convenient annual period.

Mr. MacGregor: I am arranging for the information requested to be placed in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Departmental Flowers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the annual cost of flowers supplied to the House; and which Departments of the House use them.

Mr. Beith: In the last financial year the Refreshment Department spent £8,997 on flowers for the areas under its control. Flowers are also supplied by arrangement with the Refreshment Department for private functions; but their cost is charged to the sponsoring Member's account.

I understand that the Parliamentary Works Office has responsibility for the supply of flowers to the Speaker's state rooms and other parts of the House, including the Terrace.

DEFENCE

The Gulf (Halons)

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the volume of halons released to the atmosphere in the Gulf region during Operation Granby/Desert Storm as a result of the in-flight refuelling of military planes of the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no evidence to suggest that any halon gases are released during the air-to-air refuelling of RAF aircraft.

Nuclear Deterrent

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account is taken of the size of the United States and Soviet Union's arsenals in setting the size of the United Kingdom nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent is not based on any specific numerical correlation with the nuclear arsenals of others. Rather, it has long been United Kingdom policy to maintain only the minimum numbers of weapons necessary to deter aggression. In this respect the need to ensure that our nuclear deterrent remains effective against improving Soviet defences is of overriding importance when considering the size of our force.

Trigat

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's involvement in the Trigat programme and the committed cost incurred to date.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom is a full member of the European collaborative group procuring the Trigat systems.

Expenditure to date has been £130 million.

Regiments

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *733*, when his noble Friend will write regarding information on individual regiments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend wrote to the hon. Member today.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he held with his NATO counterparts about the proposed reductions in the Royal Navy under the "Options for Change" process prior to 25 July 1990.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's proposals for changes to its defence forces in response to the changing strategic environment in Europe, including the proposed reductions for the Royal Navy, were set out in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement on "Options for Change" last summer. These proposals were carefully considered in the light of international developments and the work under way to determine the alliance's new military posture. At the time of the announcement it was made clear that the United Kingdom's proposals would be subject to consultation with our NATO allies. In common with our allies, we have since engaged in formal consultations within the alliance and with our allies about our future plans.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to publish a statement detailing the total anticipated effect of the" Options for Change" process on *(a)* the procurement budget and *(b)* the personnel budget.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimates of expenditure in 1991-92 on equipment procurement and on personnel will be given in the annual defence White Paper, to be published on 9 July. It is not our policy to disclose details of our financial plans beyond the estimates year.

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has held with companies involved in the manufacture of defence equipment concerning the formulation of Her Majesty's Government's policy "Options for Change"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 23 May 1991 at column *613* of the *Official Report*.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make his policy to publish a detailed statement on the strategic rationale underlying the "Options for Change" process.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This will be covered in the annual defence White Paper to be published on 9 July.

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offers he has received from trade associations representing manufacturers of equipment for defence to assist in the formulation of Her Majesty's Government's policy on "Options for Change"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Discussions between Ministers and trade associations are conducted on a confidential basis.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for reducing his Department's headquarters under "Option for Change".

Mr. Tom King: As I made clear in my statement on 25 July 1990 on "Options for Change" my intention is to make substantial savings across the whole field of defence activities. This will involve both the armed forces and their civilian support and include the MOD headquarters which I have decided to restructure and slim down proportionately to the overall reductions.

I plan to achieve a smaller and more cohesive central headquarters, resulting in savings of about 20 per cent. in the uniformed and civilian top structure. Generally similar reductions will be carried through the organisation as a whole. The fall in numbers in the London element of the headquarters will be proportionately greater because in addition a substantial range of functions will be relocated and will merge with existing support establishments and commands elsewhere. On current expectations staff numbers in London are expected to fall from about 14,500 by some 7,000.

Overall under "Options for Change" the number of MOD civilian posts at home and abroad is currently expected to fall by about 20 per cent., the same proportion as the armed forces. About 20,000 posts will be saved in the United Kingdom and 15,000 abroad. This reduction will go forward at the same pace as in the armed forces overall.

Soviet Navy

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Soviet counterpart regarding the future programme of Soviet naval shipbuilding.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has not discussed the future programme of Soviet naval shipbuilding with his Soviet counterpart.

Nuclear-powered Submarines

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the programmed acceptance date for the first of class for a new generation of nuclear-powered submarines envisaged in Staff Target (Sea) 7027.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The first of class submarine envisaged in Staff Target (Sea) 7027 was expected to enter service by the end of the century. The precise date is classified.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure to date has been incurred on feasibility studies into an SSN20 class of submarine.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: To date expenditure of some £44 million has been incurred on the SSN20 feasibility studies. These studies have produced valuable information which will be of use for both the studies into a batch 2 Trafalgar class and for the programme to update the Swiftsure and Trafalgar class sonar capability.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he commissioned the first feasibility studies into the SSN20 class of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Feasibility studies into an SSN20 class nuclear-powered submarine were approved in February 1986.

HMS Fearless and Intrepid

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure to date has been incurred on feasibility studies into *(a)* replacing HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid and *(b)* refurbishing HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Expenditure to date on feasibility studies into the replacement of the assault ships amounts to £4·14 million, and that into extending their lives to £161,000.

Sandown Class Minehunters

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which companies submitted tenders last year for the supply of Sandown class minehunters; and what was the total value of these tenders.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The four companies invited to tender for the supply of Sandown class minehunters were Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd., Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd., Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd. and Swan Hunter Shipbuilders and Engineering Ltd. The tenders covered the supply of various numbers of ships up to a maximum of seven; the value of the tenders is commercially confidential.

Anti-air Warfare Frigate

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state when he expects to complete his studies of the design of a new anti-air warfare frigate to replace the type 42 destroyer.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 23 May, *Official Report*, column *615*.

Wing Commander Farquhar

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to identify the person who removed documents and computer materials from the car left unattended by Wing Commander Farquhar in the circumstances which formed the basis of the recent court martial; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The investigation of the theft of materials from the car is a matter for the Metropolitan police. I cannot comment further.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 5 July 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

Women Prisoners

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken in response to the Women's National Commission report on women in prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have already announced changes in certain areas covered by the report. For example, the number of statutory visits to which sentenced inmates are entitled was increased to two each month on 17 June, and we have also announced our intention to make cardphones available in prisons holding unconvicted prisoners. We shall be responding shortly to the Women's National Commission on other issues covered by the report, and will arrange for a copy of our reply to be placed in the Library.

Prisoners (Transfers)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the offence a person has been convicted of is taken into account when a decision is taken to transfer or not to transfer a prisoner between England and Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes. The criteria governing such transfers, announced by the then Home Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) on 23 June 1989 at column 263, include a proviso that a request may be refused if it is considered that the prisoner's crimes were so serious as to render him or her undeserving of any degree of public sympathy or to make it inappropriate that the prisoner should benefit from a substantial reduction in time left to serve, if that would be a consequence of transfer.

Economic Migration

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency measures have been discussed or taken by him and his European colleagues with regard to possible substantial economic migration from the Soviet Union, the Balkans and Maghreb into the European Community.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend regularly discusses immigration matters with his European Community colleagues and reports regularly to the House. Trends in migration are closely monitored and there are arrangements for rapid consultation should the need arise.

Derek Bentley

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete a review of the circumstances regarding the conviction and execution of Derek Bentley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The case is still under consideration. The review will be completed as soon as possible.

United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish the names of the managing body of the UKIAS.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: UKIAS is a registered charity, controlled by a general council of representatives nominated by its member organisations. These member organisations consist of representative ethnic minority groups and other voluntary and statutory bodies. Responsibility for running the service is delegated to an executive committee elected by the general council. Full lists of member organisations and of the names of members of the general council and the executive committee are published each year in the organisation's annual report, the latest of which relates to 1989-90 and is available from the UKIAS head office, 190 Great Dover street, London SE1 4YB.

EMPLOYMENT

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places planned specifically for adults with learning difficulties were available in each of the last five years; and how many are available in the present year.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not available.

Small Companies

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will detail the main measures for assisting small companies which have been announced in the last 12 months.

Mr. Forth: The main measures have included a number of VAT easements such as increasing the registration threshold to £35,000; increasing the corporation tax threshold by 25 per cent. to £250,000; sponsoring a one-day enterprise workshop for all training and enterprise councils; giving training and enterprise councils a wide measure of flexibility on how they administer the enterprise allowance scheme; extending the enterprise initiative for a further three years and introducing three specific programmes to help small firms innovate, solve technical problems and introduce modern manufacturing systems.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reported cases of BSE there have been in each of the past six months; how many cattle have been killed; and from what number of farms in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: The information for England and Wales is as follows:

Month	Number of suspect cases of BSE reported	Number slaughtered	Number of farms from which cattle slaughtered
December 1990	1,475	1,407	1,106
January 1991	2,242	2,144	1,660
February 1991	1,803	1,703	1,356
March 1991	2,210	2,071	1,649
April 1991	2,457	2,237	1,773
May 1991	1,936	981	824

Birds

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the number of imported wild-caught birds which were dead on arrival and which were subsequently submitted to the veterinary investigations centre for analysis to ascertain the cause of death from fowl pest, salmonella or psittacosis for each year since 1987.

Mr. Maclean: Data on the number of carcases of imported captive birds submitted to veterinary investigation centres for examination are set out in my reply of 26 June to the hon. Member for Glandford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), *Official Report*, column *497*. Such data do not, however, distinguish between wild-caught and captive-bred birds, nor do they differentiate between birds dying in transit or in quarantine.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the number of different species of imported wild-caught birds which were confirmed as having died from fowl pest, salmonella or psittacosis in 1989.

Mr. Maclean: Information about the numbers of species of imported captive birds dying of specific causes is not collected in the precise form requested. Available data indicate that in 1989 at least 47 different species of imported birds were associated with salmonella infection, 11 species with Chlamydia psittaci infection, and at least 18 species died or were slaughtered as a result of fowl pest. It is not possible to differentiate between wild-caught and captive-bred birds.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Nursing Home Residents

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the number of new claimants of income support in residential and nursing homes each year since 1985;

(2) if he will estimate the number of residents in residential and nursing homes who have ceased to claim income support each year since 1985.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is held on the total number of income support recipients in residential care and nursing homes. It is not possible to distinguish between new and existing claimants, but the following table shows how total numbers have increased in each year since 1985.

	Number
December 1985	70,000
February 1986	90,000
May 1987	117,000
May 1988	147,000
May 1989	176,000
May 1990	189,000

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the number of residents in residential and nursing homes who will be in receipt of income support on 1 April 1993;

(2) on what basis he is estimating the cost of payments of income support to residents in residential and nursing homes from 1 April 1993.

Miss Widdecombe: Information about expected numbers of income support claimants as well as expenditure is published in the Public Expenditure White Paper (Cm 1014). It has never been the practice to make separate forecasts about any individual group within the planning totals.

PRIME MINISTER

National Identity Cards

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a further statement on the Government's policy towards issuing national identity cards to *(a)* immigrants and *(b)* all citizens.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary informed the House on 10 February 1989, the Government are not persuaded that a compulsory national identity card scheme should be introduced.

In the Government's view the disadvantages of a policy of issuing national identity cards, notably the high financial cost, the risk of harming the relationship between police and public, and civil liberty objections, would outweigh its benefits.

Child Benefit

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to use the post code information held by the Benefits Agency to analyse child benefit to obtain and publish up-to-date information on the numbers of children in lone and two-parent households by area.

The Prime Minister: This information cannot be obtained using child benefit records, as post codes necessary to allocate claims to local authority areas are not available for some 2 million, out of 6·7 million, payees. The objective could be achieved by other means only at disproportionate cost.

Yugoslavia

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister whether the initiative taken by the three EC Foreign Ministers who visited Yugoslavia on peace-keeping missions was undertaken at the request of the Heads of Government meeting; whether the decision to send them was unanimous; what were their terms of reference; to whom they were to report back; and whether the agreed policy precluded individual Heads of Government from expressing separate national views.

The Prime Minister: I and my EC colleagues decided at the European Council in Luxembourg on 28 June to send

the troika of EC Foreign Ministers to Belgrade and Zagreb to try to negotiate an agreement on the terms of a ceasefire which would allow negotiations between all the parties involved in the crisis in Yugoslavia. They reported back to us on the results of their mission on 29 June. The decision to send the troika was taken by consensus, as are all decisions in the field of foreign policy co-operation among the member states of the Community. The speed and unity of the Twelve's response reflected a convergence of national views on this subject. We shall, of course, continue to express our views bilaterally to the various Yugoslav parties.

Hot Pursuit

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on allowing police officers from other EC countries to enter the United Kingdom in hot pursuit of suspects.

The Prime Minister: There is currently no provision for police officers from other EC countries to enter the United Kingdom in pursuit of suspects.

UK-US Relations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on current United Kingdom relations with the United States of America in regard to *(a)* the future role of NATO, *(b)* the development of free trade and the GATT negotiations, *(c)* the strategic defence initiative, *(d)* the halting of nuclear weapons testing and *(e)* the future of Antarctica and the Antarctic treaty.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom and the United States are in full agreement with each other, and with the rest of the alliance, on NATO's future role as the cornerstone of European security. We are both committed to securing an open world trading system. We and the European Community are working closely with the United States in the GATT negotiations, which we all hope to conclude successfully by the end of the year.

Lone-Parent Families

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make arrangements for the Department of the Environment to arrange with the Benefits Agency the means of obtaining up-to-date information on the numbers of children in lone-parent households by local authority area for the purpose of assessing standard spending.

The Prime Minister: The standard spending assessments include indicators based on the most up-to-date information which is reliable at a local authority level on numbers of children and numbers of persons living in lone parent households. It is not possible to obtain more recent information by using child benefit records because the necessary post codes are not available for some 2 million out of 6·7 million, payees. An analysis of child benefit payments will not, in any case, indentify all lone parent households since some parents in receipt of income support do not claim one parent benefit as there is no financial incentive to do so.

Immigration and Frontier Controls

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will place in the Library the papers on immigration and frontier controls used during the Luxembourg summit and by his press officer subsequently to brief journalists.

The Prime Minister: I refer the honourable Gentleman to the statement I made in the House on 1 July, and the conclusions of the European Council which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Immigrants (Criminal Activity)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister what research has been undertaken into the incidence among the immigrant population, relative to the non-immigrant population, of criminal activity, in particular (i) drug trafficking and (ii) terrorism, and of contribution to racial tension.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any research of these specific matters.

ENVIRONMENT

International Concert Hall, Manchester

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove of 27 June, if he will indicate from which budgets or vote subheads the funds made available for the International concert hall, Manchester, have come; and what plans he has for further funding.

Mr. Portillo: The funding so far approved for the concert hall, for feasibility studies, is from class VIII, vote 3, subhead D8 (Central Manchester Development Corporation). The Department will consider further funding on receipt of a full project submission from the development corporation.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to compel the water companies to add fragrances to sewage sludge disposed of on land.

Mr. Baldry: The Government have no plans to do so. A code of practice for agricultural use of sewage sludge was published in 1989 which contains guidance on effective odour control. Generally adequate treatment of the sludge or incorporation into the soil reduces any odour problems.

Local Government Review

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he gives to the Local Government Boundary Commission in respect of the release of advance copies of its reports on local government structure and boundaries *(a)* to the press and *(b)* local Members of Parliament in the areas covered by the review.

Mr. Key: None.

Aggregates

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to incorporate assumptions about increases in the cost of

mining activities to reflect the increased value placed on countryside preservation in the preparation of future forecasts of national demand for primary aggregates.

Mr. Yeo: Before new guidelines for primary aggregate provision are published the environmental costs will be carefully considered. A number of studies are in progress which will assist this task.

Sheffield Development Corporation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his answer of 19 June, *Official Report*, column *183*, how many jobs have been created by the Sheffield development corporation since its inception, excluding jobs at the Meadowhall development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to my written answer of 4 June, column *166*. I also wrote to the hon. Member on 17 June on this subject.

Local Government Boundary Commission

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the numbers of staff and annual costs of the Local Government Boundary Commission; the number of reports it issues each year; and the numbers and names of the reviews currently in progress.

Mr. Key: The commission has a staff of 36 and an annual running cost of approximately £770,000. In 1990-91 it issued 24 reports.

The commission is currently carrying out statutory reviews of the 36 metropolitan districts, the 32 London boroughs, the City of London and the Inner and Middle Temples. In addition, it is completing the statutory reviews of the non-metropolitan counties with a review of the Suffolk/Cambridgeshire boundary and a second review of part of the North Yorkshire/Cleveland boundary. It also considers reviews of parishes carried out by district councils as and when these are submitted.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the material studies and conclusions from the Local Government Boundary Commission's final recommendation for the county of Humberside will be referred to the new review of the structure of local government.

Mr. Key: Decisions on the steps to be taken following the commission's report will be made after the statutory period for public comment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the exact time and date when the Local Government Boundary Commission report was released *(a)* to the media, *(b)* to hon. Members and *(c)* to local authorities; and what advice he has given to the commission on releasing information to hon. Members to enable them to answer media questions.

Mr. Key: The timing of the release of its reports is a matter for the commission. I have given no advice to it on the subject.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total cost of the Local Government Boundary Commission's review of Humberside and the separate costs of each stage of the review.

Mr. Key: It is not possible to separate the costs of an individual review from the total costs of the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new instructions he gave to the Local Government Boundary Commission following his statement of 23 April, *Official Report*, column 901, concerning his preference for unitary authorities in respect of the review of the county of Humberside.

Mr. Key: None.

Peat Bogs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the sites of undisturbed raised peat bog in England, *(b)* the total hectarage of such sites, *(c)* the proportion designated sites of special scientific interest and *(d)* the proportion of those designated sites in the ownership of peat digging companies.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is to be included in the national peatlands resource inventory currently being researched by the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. Further detailed research is to take place over the coming months. I will arrange for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library when it is published.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements are being made under part II of the Environmental Protection Act for waste disposal authorities to divest themselves of their waste disposal operations; whether he foresees an increasing role for the private sector in waste disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: Waste disposal authorities are currently developing plans under the Environmental Protection Act to divest themselves of their disposal operations.

At the time when public resources are under renewed pressure, it is vital that the private sector plays its full part. I shall now be making WDAs take action by issuing to them, where necessary, notices and directions to set up local authority waste disposal companies. LAWDCs are not the only way WDAs may divest themselves of their operations, but, if they wish to set them up, they must be viable. If not, WDAs will need to arrange for a joint venture or privatise their operations.

Moreover, I intend to seek information from WDAs about the capital investment requirements for the new waste disposal operations in their areas from 1992-93 onwards, and how much of these requirements could be financed outside public expenditure. Higher standards in waste disposal are likely to require higher levels of capital investment over the next few years. But the amounts available for public sector expenditure in this field are inevitably limited. This will mean that LAWDCs will normally have to have private sector involvement if they wish to carry out appropriate capital investment. I shall be consulting the local authority associations about the details. I shall also be looking at further measures in due course.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Facilities

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provisions govern the consultations which local education authorities are obliged to undertake with governing bodies of schools over *(a)* use by outside organisations of unused portions of buildings which are otherwise in use as schools and *(b)* shared use of school facilities by outside organisations.

Mr. Fallon: Section 16 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 provides for the conduct of county, voluntary and maintained special schools to be under the direction of the governing body. Outside school hours, section 42 of the Act provides, in the case of county and maintained special schools, for the use of school premises to be under the control of the governing body, subject to any direction given by the local education authority. A similar provision for voluntary schools is contained in section 22 of the Education Act 1944.

Nuclear Structure Facility

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what alternative provision will be made to replace postgraduate access to the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury for degree purposes.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Postgraduate students will have access to the nuclear structure facility until its closure in 1992-93. The Science and Engineering Research Council is currently reviewing how research and training in nuclear structurer physics should be pursued beyond this period.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what will be the anticipated cost of redundancy as a result of the closure of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury;

(2) what are the total estimated costs of the closure of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The SERC's current estimate of the cost of decommissioning and dismantling the nuclear structure facility is £2 million. In addition, there will be the costs of some redundancies which will not be known until nearer the anticipated date of closure in 1992-93.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the cost of the manpower involved in constructing the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The element of manpower in the construction costs is not separately available and could be obtained by the Science and Engineering Research Council only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science between what dates the LINAC facility is planned to be used within the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No dates have been set by the Science and Engineering Research Council for the operation of the LINAC at its nuclear structure facility.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total cost at current prices of constructing the nuclear structure facility and its subsequent enhancements.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies that I gave him on 25 June 1991, *Official Report*, columns *39-40*.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are SERC's plans for the linear accelerator at the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury laboratory in the light of the proposed closure of the laboratory.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understand that no final decision has yet been taken by the SERC on the future of the LINAC accelerator.

LINC Report

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will put a copy of the "Language in the National Curriculum" report, the LINC report, in the Library;

(2) if he will give a breakdown of the cost of producing the LINC report.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave on 21 June 1991, *Official Report*, column *320*, to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). The precise cost of producing the LINC in-service training package is not separable from the Department's grant to be co-ordinator of the LINC programme. That is expected to be about £120,000, but it also covers costs involved in the central co-ordination of the training programme.

East Birmingham Task Force

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what visits or other official engagements were undertaken by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science during his visit to the East Birmingham task force area on 1 May.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The programme included a meeting with the task force team and visits to Just for Starters Ltd., Jona Sova Seba Committee, the Parkview access centre, St. Matthews school and Nechells and Duddeston youth centre.

HEALTH

Tower Hamlets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of local government electors for Tower Hamlets for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979	110,611
1980	111,447
1981	111,156
1982	112,073
1983	113,859
1984	112,256
1985	112,036
1986	113,203
1987	115,472
1988	113,671
1989	113,743
1990	112,550
1991	105,922

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of *(a)* men aged 65 years and over and *(b)* women aged 60 years and over for each year since 1979 in Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimates of resident population requested for Tower Hamlets are given in the table.

Thousands

Mid year	*Men aged 65 and over*	*Women aged 60 and over*
1979	9·0	17·3
1980	8·9	17·4
1981	8·8	17·1
1982	8·8	17·2
1983	8·5	17·1
1984	8·4	16·9
1985	8·5	16·8
1986	8·7	16·7
1987	8·8	16·5
1988	8·7	16·2
1989	8·7	15·9

NHS Trusts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has issued to health authority trust funds about inappropriate investment;

(2) what information he has on the incidence of health authority trust funds investing in tobacco companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Trustee Investment Act 1961 gives the basic powers for investing in particular securities. We have not issued any specific guidance. Information about investment by health authority trust funds in any particular security is not held centrally.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have been closed in each year since 1974.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

RU486

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what trials the drug RU486 has undergone; and for how long a period.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Mifepristone (RU486) has been used by over 100,000 women worldwide and by more than 80,000 women in France.

Permission to perform clinical trials in the United Kingdom under the Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Clinical Trials) Order 1981, S.I. No. 164, was granted in December 1986. These trials have been carried out in 15 centres, with approximately 1,500 women taking part.

Health Promotion

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the role of health visitors in health promotion and health education in the community and their role in providing advice to people in their own homes and in the context of their own lifestyles and family circumstances;

(2) what appropriate qualifications he supports for nurses undertaking health advice and health promotion work in the community.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 2 July 1991]:* All health professionals have a responsibility to promote positive health in their work with patients and clients and their families and carers.

Health visitors are uniquely placed as a profession to make a significant contribution in health promotion and education and disease prevention. The Government's new strategy for health puts an even stronger emphasis on improving health. Health visitors provide advice systematically and opportunistically to people in their own homes as well as other places.

Nurses in possession of a health visitor or district nurse qualification are especially equipped with skills in health promotion and disease prevention. Other nurses who have been suitably educated and trained for their roles in the community are also able to fulfil these functions.

Health Visitors

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sponsored places for health visiting students there have been in each of the past 10 years; and what steps he is taking to ensure that health visiting training is adequately funded and that there is sufficient sponsorship of students.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 2 July 1991]:* The number of sponsored places is not collected centrally. Details of the number of student health visitors and those entering training can however be found in "The NHS Workforce in England 1991", a copy of which is in the Library. It is for health authorities to determine their own manpower plans, including training needs. Regional health authorities have, however, been advised that post-registration professional training, including health visitor training, should, for the time being, be funded from a separate and protected regional budget, and they have been asked to identify current investment in such training.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* In his reply to a similar question from the right hon. Member, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out on 4 July at column *184* the aim underlying the policies of the Government towards people with disabilities.

In order to achieve the aim of enabling people with disabilities to take a full part in the life of the community, we are continuously reviewing and improving the provision of a broad spectrum of services for disabled people.

We agree with the authors of the manifesto that access to information is essential to enable people with disabilities to make reasoned choices.

In March I announced the establishment of the national disability information project, which has a budget of £3 million over three years, to fund pilot projects to identify good practice in the collection and dissemination of information at a local level to disabled people and their carers.

Guidance on the implementation of the community care reforms and the Children Act 1989, which will be

implemented in October, draws attention to the need for service providers to produce information in formats which are appropriate for people with a sensory disability.

The Department grant-aids the production of Braille and has provided financial support for a variety of initiatives concerned with the development of sign languages and other communication techniques, including the production of information about the NHS reforms in Braille and sign language formats.

We agree that the prevention of disability and improved rehabilitation services are important goals. An advisory group on rehabilitation was set up earlier this year to advise on developments in NHS rehabilitation which would improve the range of services available to people with disabilities, and help them to lead as full a life as possible.

In May we announced a central initiative to improve rehabilitation services for people with brain injury. We will be supporting the development of a number of centres around the country which can act as models to the rest of the NHS, and carrying out an evaluation of the services they provide.

Between 1987-89, the Department contributed £800,000 towards a new rehabilitation centre for people who are deaf and blind with additional handicaps. In April 1990, the Department introduced new procedure for certifying people as blind or partially sighted.

In 1990, the Department launched two new initiatives under which it will make available nearly £3 million to the NHS for a cochlear implant programme and 12 pilot projects aimed at improving hearing aid services.

We will shortly publish the results of a review of continence services, including the recommendations for action to promote a good quality service throughout the country.

In June, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State made a statement at Mencap's annual conference on the future developments of services for people with learning disabilities. We have recently issued for consultation a draft local authority circular on social care for people with learning disabilities, and a parallel draft health circular on the role of the NHS in providing health care for this client group.

Considerable additional resources have already been committed to personal social services, including services for people with disabilities, where spending has increased by 53 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79.

When the new arrangements for community care are fully implemented in April 1993 local authorities will be required to assess the needs of people with disabilities and to provide the appropriate services that will best meet those needs. We make it clear in our guidance that users of the service and their carers should be involved as closely as possible in decisions about what services should be provided to them individually and that voluntary organisations representing users and carers be consulted in the preparation of community care plans.

One of the key objectives of the Government's proposals is to ensure that service providers make practical support for carers a high priority. The introduction of a complaints procedure open to all service users and their carers is a major step forward. It is part of the progress being made towards making services responsive to users' needs and it will encourage the drive for better quality services.

In addition, this year we are spending over £2,300,000 on grants to voluntary bodies in the disability field.

Internationally, the Government are actively participating in the European Community's HELIOS programme which aims to promote the integration into the community of both adults and children with disabilities.

We maintain an active role in the Council of Europe as members of the committee on rehabilitation.

We support the United Nations world programme of action concerning disabled persons and in particular the UN global project designed to mark the end of the UN decade of disabled persons 1983-92.

These major programmes, taken together with a range of other initiatives, illustrate the level of commitment to improving services for disabled people. We will continue to build on them in the future.

WALES

Urban Development Corporation

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the budget of each urban development corporation to cover the provision for training in each of the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Cardiff Bay development corporation's expenditure on the provision of training was £17,300 in 1989-90 and £124,500 in 1990-91. The budget for training and social grants in 1991-92 is £399,000, of which it is estimated that £120,000 will be spent on training.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the capital provided in the budget for all the urban development corporations for the provision of housing for the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Cardiff Bay development corporation does not have a budget for the provision of housing. The value of land given to housing associations within the urban development area in 1989-90 and 1990-91 was:

	£
1989-90	Nil
1990-91	3,275,000

It is estimated that land valued at £66,000 will be donated for housing association use in 1991-92.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of houses provided by each of the urban development corporations for each year of operation to 31 March.

Mr. David Hunt: Cardiff Bay development corporation does not directly provide housing. The number of housing units built within the urban development area was:

	Units
1987-88	206
1988-89	198
1989-90	249
1990-91	115

The development corporation's strategy proposes 6,000 new homes, of which a quarter will be for social housing.

HIV

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have been diagnosed as HIV positive in each health authority in Wales for each of the past 36 months.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: For reasons of confidentiality and in line with the AIDS (Control) Act, numbers between one and nine inclusive are given as "less than 10". The figures requested are all less than 10.

Transit Itinerants Site, Gresford

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to require an environmental assessment regarding the transit itinerants site at Gresford.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Under the terms of the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environment Effects) Regulations 1988 environmental assessment is not required for gipsy sites.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many places planned specifically for adults with learning difficulties were available in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many are available in the present year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not available.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospitals have been closed in each year since 1974.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism (Londonderry)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for each year, or if more convenient financial year, since 1968 to the latest available date *(a)* the sums claimed for (i) criminal damage and (ii) criminal injury, resulting from terrorist activity in Londonderry city, and the sums paid in each such year, relating as far as possible the sums to the year in which the damage or injury was inflicted.

Dr. Mawhinney: Such information as is available is contained in the tables.

Amounts of compensation paid by financial year
Criminal damage

Year damage sustained	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1973-74	91,976	85,120	38,357	0	500	0	7,381	0	0	0	0	0	0
1974-75	66,594	73,919	27,632	128,862	250	0	0	0	0	248,872	113,799	0	0
1975-76	28,015	49,056	43,689	0	5,504	0	2,496	0	0	0	0	0	0
1976-77	486,793	541,862	341,529	173,140	137,255	21,156	0	0	0	4,000	0	0	0
1977-78	470,539	267,472	36,490	2,605	55,652	12,328	5,203	0	0	0	0	0	0
1978-79	194,527	734,385	344,232	28,485	27,559	16,600	20,546	23,400	3,354	0	0	0	0
1979-80	0	1,006,610	749,813	372,396	180,642	44,081	195,260	173,553	26,348	0	2,197	0	0
1980-81	0	0	820,886	475,951	557,772	244,617	29,393	3,434	3,890	0	0	0	10,000
1981-82	0	0	0	1,480,629	1,236,601	437,946	135,314	90,852	53,801	248,872	113,799	0	0
1982-83	0	0	0	0	1,281,162	621,326	231,432	153,116	81,578	2,291	7,000	0	10,000
1983-84	0	0	0	0	0	546,311	599,498	174,984	9,461	14,167	295	740	0
1984-85	0	0	0	0	0	0	208,834	635,755	143,909	107,313	33,442	0	0
1985-86	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	418,675	690,881	271,807	47,374	58,997	28,727
1986-87	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43,395	98,871	26,584	22,921	301
1987-88	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	334,006	303,246	102,921	14,948
1988-89	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,192	451,761	153,295
1989-90	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	370,134	116,642
1990-91	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,825
Totals	1,338,444	2,758,424	2,403,108	2,664,068	3,482,897	1,944,365	1,435,357	1,673,769	1,056,617	1,081,327	556,129	1,007,474	338,739

Amounts exclude costs and fees incurred by applicants.

Amounts of compensation paid by financial year
Criminal injury

Year injury sustained	1978-79 (part year)	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1977-78	13,579	25,750	33,000	25,000	5,000	5,000	54,400	0	0	0	0	0	5,000
1978-79	5,232	3,229	19,250	9,600	34,400	5,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1979-80	0	7,469	10,375	64,284	50,250	4,800	26,500	0	0	0	0	0	0
1980-81	0	0	12,000	58,500	8,800	55,600	193,000	0	9,000	0	0	0	0
1981-82	0	0	0	38,200	160,603	205,910	157,598	350,000	39,000	0	3,250	0	0
1982-83	0	0	0	0	22,100	74,483	91,880	165,884	45,000	2,750	23,500	0	0
1983-84	0	0	0	0	0	64,400	70,516	165,728	102,415	411,550	27,550	4,517	0
1984-85	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,350	210,087	198,510	21,027	45,134	73,500	4,250
1985-86	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	600	22,416	68,302	121,575	3,500	103,573

Year injury sustained	1978-79 (part year)	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
1986-87	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12,000	62,063	512,722	169,447	56,574
1987-88	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,000	81,999	99,973	61,661
1988-89	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	61,929	144,352
1989-90	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,000	54,762
1990-91	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	18,811	36,448	74,625	195,584	261,153	415,193	603,244	912,299	426,341	590,692	815,680	414,866	430,172

Amounts exclude costs and fees incurred by applicants.

Rural Action Programmes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on rural action programmes which contribute to overcoming isolation and poverty.

Mr. Hanley: Given the rural nature of much of Northern Ireland most Departments and statutory agencies administer programmes which help to a greater or lesser degree in meeting social and economic need in rural areas.

A particular example is the community regeneration and improvement special programme, jointly funded by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and the International Fund for Ireland, which provides assistance to community groups and district councils undertaking projects to achieve local economic regeneration in villages and smaller towns in areas of particular disadvantage.

In order to assist those local groups developing plans to tackle social and economic need in the most deprived rural areas of the Province, and to optimise the impact of the Government's social and economic programmes in the more remote areas, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accepted recently the recommendations of the Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Development. He appointed me the Minister responsible and accordingly I am at present engaged in setting up a Rural Development Council outside Government to act as an advice and resource centre for rural community groups. An executive chairman has already been appointed. Within the Department of Agriculture a rural development division has been established which will support a small team of area co-ordinators to co-ordinate the local delivery of statutory programmes and services and to provide integrated statutory responses to local development plans.

It is hoped that these structures will be fully in place by the autumn of this year.

Toxic Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of, and levels of, any potential catalytic metals in the structure or in the containment drums for waste incinerated at the proposed incinerator at Maydown, Londonderry.

Mr. Needham: Such details are not yet available. If the proposed incinerator comes into operation the types of waste are likely to be organic chemicals and non-metal bearing. The drums are likely to be of carbon steel which presents no environmental risk.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies are available to him of technologies for the disposal of the types of toxic waste it is proposed to incinerate at the Maydown, Londonderry site.

Mr. Needham: The assessment of any proposal to incinerate waste would include the study of comparative and alternative facilities. Officials in the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland are, of course, aware of such studies in other parts of the world.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the specifications of the type of incinerator which is being proposed fo Maydown, Londonderry.

Mr. Needham: Such details will emerge only after the completion of the feasibilty study and could be made available only when a formal application is made by Du Pont (UK) Ltd.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Du Pont company on the possibility of shipping the toxic and hazardous wastes produced by the company in Northern Ireland to the Du Pont incinerator in the United States of America.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom Government are anxious to cease the export of waste out of their territory and there is a presumption in favour of national self-sufficiency in the provision of hazardous facilities.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with any companies about the construction of chemical or other plants in Northern Ireland which would produce the type of material the proposed incinerator at Maydown, Londonderry could burn; and what assessment he has made of the expected amount of such materials to be produced in Northern Ireland in the next four years.

Mr. Needham: None.

Further Education

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the document entitled "Further Education in Northern Ireland—The Road Ahead" launched on 25 June will be available in the Vote Office.

Dr. Mawhinney: This document was not required to be laid and was not, therefore, placed in the Vote Office. However, it has been available in the Library since 26 June. In addition, copies were sent on the day of publication to Northern Ireland Members of Parliament at their home addresses.

Student Grants

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the maximum level of grant aid available to students at third level education, pursuing degree courses, and staying in lodgings;

(2) what period of time is the student grant designed to cover.

Dr. Mawhinney: The maximum maintenance grant for a student living away from home during term time is £2,265: for those living in London this rises to £2,845. These rates of grant cover the normal period of 213 days —178 days in the case of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge—during which a student is expected to be in attendance at a course, together with the Christmas and Easter vactions. Tuition fees are also paid: the current year's amount is £1,675.

A student who is required to attend a course for longer than the normal period is eligible for a supplementary maintenance grant for each week or part week of the further period. For a student residing in the London area the weekly rate is £63·15: elsewhere in the United Kingdom it is £47·30.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to require the chairman of British Rail to publish the environmental impact study which was made on the line from Peckham via Brixton and Clapham to Waterloo.

Mr. Freeman: No environmental statement was necessary for the works at Waterloo and at Stewart's lane, which were authorised by the Channel Tunnel Act 1987. British Rail agreed with nearby residents to undertake measures to mitigate noise.

SCOTLAND

Schools

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of capital expenditure on schools in *(a)* each regional authority in Scotland and *(b)* Scotland in total, in each year since 1978-79, in constant prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information given in the following table has been compiled from local authority financial returns. The fall in expenditure in real terms during the period reflects a substantial and progressive decline in pupil numbers which has reduced the requirement for new school building.

Capital expenditure by local authorities on schools at 1989-90 prices

£ thousands

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Borders	646	1,108	1,774	1,424	928	970	1,199	1,325	1,055	1,087	1,128	1,591
Central	8,208	6,550	4,606	3,741	2,004	1,474	1,422	1,753	2,863	3,198	4,651	4,992
Dumfries and Galloway	2,444	3,028	2,666	2,579	2,948	3,312	3,120	3,068	2,531	750	1,767	1,809
Fife	7,239	4,599	4,244	3,821	3,364	2,353	3,784	5,336	5,525	2,374	5,056	5,815
Grampian	16,775	13,733	14,682	18,252	12,393	8,969	7,624	10,273	9,548	2,585	3,626	3,914
Highland	6,935	4,667	4,450	4,953	4,062	2,276	1,073	1,644	1,354	2,881	3,888	3,902
Lothian	21,055	15,541	14,790	10,938	11,555	8,139	7,803	7,638	4,493	9,267	8,327	11,568
Strathclyde	54,418	34,699	32,241	36,291	27,452	27,220	26,226	25,002	20,816	22,532	26,484	26,476
Tayside	5,390	4,471	2,922	2,782	2,892	2,000	2,776	3,427	2,422	3,734	3,835	3,520
Orkney	974	311	161	931	1,750	1,238	1,646	1,508	1,099	1,119	1,092	990
Shetland	4,142	5,831	5,245	5,497	3,913	3,460	2,402	1,314	604	614	988	723
Western Isles	951	973	1,062	2,199	2,365	1,265	1,266	1,480	3,906	4,425	2,336	1,584
Scotland	129,177	95,511	88,843	93,408	75,626	62,676	60,341	63,768	56,216	54,566	63,178	66,884

Notes: The figures includes expenditure on nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.
Outturn figures have been converted to 1989-90 prices using the GDP deflator.

Mental Illness Grant

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amount sought for the mental illness specific grant in 1991-92 by each regional and islands authority in Scotland and the amount actually paid out to date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The amounts sought and grant offered are as follows:

Region	*Amount sought* £	*Grant offered* £
Borders	75,000	75,000
Central	105,000	92,372
Dumfries and Galloway	85,000	85,400
Fife	131,806	131,806
Grampian	240,000	190,426
Highland	107,100	79,800
Lothian	279,844	279,844
Strathclyde	851,697	736,197
Tayside	170,792	148,512
Orkney Island	35,000	35,000
Shetland	39,900	39,900
Western Isles	50,000	50,000
Totals	2,171,139	1,944,257

Nothing has been paid out to date because the grant is payable three monthly in arrears.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals have been closed in each year since 1974.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally for the period 1974-1979. However, from 1979 to June 1991 51 hospitals have been closed in Scotland. During the same period, 74 major new hospitals have been opened.

Fife Social Work Department

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate when he expects to receive and publish the report by Sheriff Kearney into the social work department of Fife regional council.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As I said in my reply of 23 April to the hon. Member, the chairman of the inquiry into child care policies in Fife has finished hearing evidence from the parties concerned and my right hon. Friend hopes to receive the report in the near future. As soon as he has the report he shall make a decision about publication.

Crofting

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will make a statement on the provision of housing assistance for fishermen through the crofting building grants and loans scheme.

Mr. Lang: The primary purpose of the crofting building grants and loans scheme (CBGLS) is to provide assistance to those who intend to live on and cultivate crofts, since crofting tenure does not allow the croft house to be used as security for a commercial loan. However, under the powers available through the Congested Districts (Scotland) Act 1897, the scheme has also been used to provide assistance to tenants of fishermen's holdings created in Lewis following the first world war and to fishermen feuars in the former crofting counties who have been able to demonstrate a secure title to a house site. In practice, however, only a relatively small proportion of loans and grants under the scheme have been made to applicants in these categories.

Over the years, the provision of special housing assistance to certain categories of fishermen through the scheme has become increasingly anomalous since the individuals do not face the same barriers as crofters in obtaining other forms of housing finance. In the light of these considerations and the announcement in April 1990 about the criteria for assistance under the scheme, I have decided that in future housing assistance will not be available to fishermen who do not otherwise qualify as crofters or to the occupants of the Lewis fishermen's holdings. However, to avoid any undue hardship those fishermen who at the date of this announcement have title to a house site and are currently eligible to apply will have a period of three years from the date of this announcement to bring forward an application for assistance.

All applications received during this period will be considered on their merits in the light of the existing eligibility criteria for the scheme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computer Misuse Act 1990

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the convictions under the Computer Misuse Act 1990.

Mr. Leigh: To date, there has been one conviction under the Computer Misuse Act 1990. The defendant was convicted of two offences under section 2 of the Act at Bow street magistrates court, London, and was sentenced to pay a fine of £450 for each offence.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to make an announcement on United Kingdom attendance at the forthcoming CSCE conference on the human dimension in Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: We plan to send a delegation to the Moscow CSCE conference on the human dimension, subject to developments in the Soviet Union between now and September. Participation in the conference would enable us to press for further improvements over those human rights issues which cause us concern.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will raise with the Government of Syria the alleged involvement of Syrian terrorists, before their arrest, in the Lockerbie plane bombing; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has sought to raise with the Government of Libya the alleged involvement of Libyan nationals or residents in the Lockerbie bombing.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The investigation into the Lockerbie disaster is being pursued by the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary, under the direction of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office stands ready to assist the constabulary in any way it requires in pursuit of international aspects of the investigation.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) who authorised the senior official of his office to make statements about the Lockerbie bomb link reported in *The Sunday Times* of 30 June;

(2) who authorised the spokesman from his office to make the statements on Libya attributed to that official on BBC radio and BBC television news on 28 June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The line taken by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesmen in response to media inquiries has consistently been that they cannot comment on a continuing police investigation.

United Nations Secretary-General

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which members of the Government met the United Nations Secretary-General on his visit to the United Kingdom on 30 June; and what was discussed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I called on the Secretary-General on 29 June and discussed subjects of current international interest including the situation in Iraq.

Expo 92

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer on 28 June, *Official Report*, column *568*, if he will make it his policy to include in the overall exhibition theme at the British pavilion at Expo 92 in Seville the appropriate use of Gibraltarian expertise and appropriate exhibits from Gibraltar.

Mr. Garel-Jones: As I have made clear in previous answers our policy is to select exhibits for the British pavilion at Expo 92 on the basis of their relevance to the theme "Original Britain" rather than their place of origin.

DEFENCE

Injured Grenadiers

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many witnesses were called by the board of inquiry investigating the Grenadier accident at Batus, Canada on 7 July 1989, to give evidence as to the proper execution of safety procedures and of safety briefings to Grenadier Guardsmen Adrian Hicks, John Ray and Sean Povey.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. The board of inquiry was able to reach conclusions based on written evidence without conducting interviews.

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, at the proposed meeting between his Department and the legal representatives of the injured guardsmen, he will make it his policy to disclose the full content of the board of inquiry report and to accede to a request to reopen the board of inquiry.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to release the proceedings of boards of inquiry to outside parties, but officials will, of course, make every effort to answer any questions about the circumstances of the accident at Batus that the solicitors representing the three Guardsmen may put. If a request is made at the meeting to re-open the board of inquiry we shall consider this on its merits and in the light of other means of obtaining any necessary information.

Infantry, Northern Ireland

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a further statement on his plans to deploy additional infantry battalions to Northern Ireland;

(2) what restraint is placed by current Army manning levels on his ability to provide extra infantry battalions for deployment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Army's commitments in Northern Ireland are accorded the highest priority. Force levels in Northern Ireland are kept under constant review and will continue to be adjusted as and when it is judged necessary to do so.

The Gulf

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what approximate proportion of Tornado strikes against enemy airfields in the Gulf war were made by GR1 aircraft linked to Buccaneers equipped to Pavespike laser designators; what proportion were made after thermal imaging airborne laser designator equipment became available; and which of these two systems achieved the best overall results in the targeting of Paveway II bombs.

Mr. Alan Clark: About 40 per cent. of Tornado GR1 and Buccaneer attacks against Iraqi airfields used the Pavespike designation system to target laser-guided bombs, and nearly 30 per cent. used TIALD. The performance of the two targeting systems is still being evaluated.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use was made in the Gulf by RAF Tornados of the air-launched anti-radar missile and thermal imaging airborne laser designator pods; and if he has completed his evaluation of their effectiveness.

Mr. Alan Clark: Some RAF Tornado GR1s were equipped with ALARM missiles which had been brought into service several months early. Two TIALD pods were diverted from the current development programme to be used in the Gulf. We are continuing to study all aspects of the Gulf campaign.

Regional Office, Bristol

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for constructing new regional office premises for sections of his Department in the Bristol area; over what period construction will take place; at what estimated cost; and if he will make a statement on the reason for this development.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: MOD's only current proposal for new office development in the Bristol area is that for procurement executive staff, announced on 27 March 1990. In view of the local planning difficulties that have arisen over our proposals for Keynsham, which have delayed the project by a year, we have recently completed a review of possible alternative locations in the Bristol area and elsewhere; the results are now being assessed.

Service Personnel (Injuries)

Mr. Miscampbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to take out insurance cover by his Department against the risk of injury while on service duties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) on 27 June at column *550* of the *Official Report*. The extent to which current arrangements are satisfactory is under review.

Regiments (Recruitment)

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the regiments whose potential recruiting was reduced by his policy of recruitment capping in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Recruiting was not capped in 1988-89 or in 1989-90. In 1990-91, the recruit intake was limited to 16,000. In consequence, recruit allocations to all arms and services throughout the Army were reduced.

Z-Berths

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the criteria for designating a Z-berth; what provisions for civilian safety and evacuation exist at Z-berth sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Individual Z-berths are designated on the basis of operational and safety considerations. Safety arrangements include a public safety scheme, prepared after discussion with the local authorities and civil emergency services, which sets out detailed arrangements for the site in question.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* those countries whose vessels are currently permitted to visit United Kingdom Z-berth sites and *(b)* what vessels are currently permitted to visit United Kingdom Z-berth sites; what visits he envisages in the future to Holy Loch; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Nuclear powered warships from the United States and French navies in addition to the Royal Navy may be permitted to visit United Kingdom Z-berths. No specific visits to the Holy Loch are planned following the withdrawal of the US facilities there, although occasional future visits by nuclear powered submarines are possible.

International Military Services

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the export activities of International Military Services within Iraq.

Mr. Alan Clark: International Military Services has at all times complied with Government policy and export licence regulations in conducting business in Iraq as elsewhere.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation or contact he has had with W. S. Atkins and Partners or any people associated with W. S. Atkins and Partners regarding the future of International Military Services.

Mr. Alan Clark: None.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information his Department has about the engagement of employees of International Military Services on defence-related projects or contracts in Iraq after May 1988;

(2) what information his Department has about the engagement of employees of W. S. Atkins and Partners on defence-related construction projects in Iraq after May 1988.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our normal practice to comment on the activities of employees of particular firms, except where there is evidence that Government policy has been breached.

Defence Arms Control Unit

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work is currently being undertaken by the defence arms control unit.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* The defence arms control unit is currently engaged in a wide range of arms control activity, including assisting in the development of United Kingdom and NATO positions on the future of conventional arms control in Europe and negotiations on a chemical weapons convention, and in preparations for the forthcoming biological weapons convention review conference.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 July 1991

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Terms

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to change the number of weeks children spend in school.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to alter existing arrangements which provide that schools—nursery classes and schools excepted—must meet for 380 half-day sessions in each school year.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will arrange for the examining boards to reschedule examinations so that children spend more of the summer term in school.

Mr. Eggar: The GCSE and GCE examination timetables are a matter for the examining bodies concerned. However, my right hon. and learned Friend has recently discussed the matter of the GCSE examination timetable with representatives of the joint council for the GCSE, and we understand that the timetable is likely to start a week later in 1992 than it did this year.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much of the school term remains unexpired after GCSE and A-level examinations have been completed: and what plans he has to ensure that the time is fully utilised.

Mr. Eggar: The dates of school terms are determined locally, while the dates of GCSE and GCE examinations vary according to both the examination boards' timetables and to the subjects taken by individual pupils.

If pupils attending school after taking external examinations are not involved in courses required under the national curriculum, this time could with advantage be used constructively, for instance to secure careeers guidance or to gain work experience.

As announced in the White Paper "Training and Education for the 21st Century"—Cmnd. 1536—the Government intend to legislate to abolish the present Easter and May school-leaving dates in favour of a single date at the end of the summer term.

Examination Standards

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what independent facilities exist to monitor examination standards since the inception of each current examination.

Mr. Eggar: The School Examinations and Assessment Council is responsible for approving all GCSE and GCE syllabuses and examinations as suitable to be offered in schools. In addition to the examining bodies' own extensive scrutiny arrangements, both SEAC and Her Majesty's inspectorate scrutinise the conduct of these examinations to ensure that standards remain appropriate and consistent between subjects and examining bodies and from year to year.

Nursery Education

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the provision of each London borough for nursery education for each year since 1979 giving *(a)* the number of nursery schools and *(b)* the number of nursery classes with pupil numbers and participation rates.

Mr. Eggar: Tables detailing nursery provision in the maintained sector in each London borough for the period 1980 to 1990, the latest date for which information is available, are being placed in the Library. Information for 1979 and separate participation rates for nursery schools and nursery classes are not readily available.

Tower Hamlets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of children aged 16 to 18 years in Tower Hamlets remained in full-time education for each year since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: The proportion of young people in Tower Hamlets aged 16 and 17 at the start of the academic year who were in full-time education—excluding those attending independent and special schools—was 44 per cent. in 1989-90. Data are not available for earlier years, because Tower Hamlets is part of the Inner London education authority and data were collected only for ILEA in total.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number and percentages of full-time students in Tower Hamlets by *(a)* primary school, *(b)* secondary school, *(c)* sixth-form centre, *(d)* sixth-form college, *(e)* colleges and polytechnics, *(f)* universities and *(g)* other educational establishments for each year since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: The numbers and percentages of pupils and students domiciled in Tower Hamlets who were in full-time education in the maintained sector in England in 1989-90 are given in the table. Information on people from Tower Hamlets attending independent schools and colleges or universities is not available. Figures for earlier years were collected from the Inner London education authority and cannot be disaggregated to borough level.

Establishment	*Full-time pupils and students*	*Percentage*
(a) Primary schools	17,254	57
(b) Secondary schools	10,486	35
(c) Sixth-form centres	—	—
(d) Sixth-form colleges	—	—
(e) Colleges and polytechnics	1,752	6
(g) Other educational establishments	895	3
Total	30,387	100

Teacher Vacancies

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his most recent assessment of teacher vacancies in London listed by education authorities for *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools.

Mr. Fallon: The most recent figures available relate to January 1990, details of which are being placed in the Library. Vacancy figures for individual authorities for January 1991 have not yet been finalised and will be placed in the Library when confirmed.

Examining Boards

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the extent of his powers vis-à-vis examining boards.

Mr. Eggar: The GCSE examining groups and GCE examining boards are independent bodies, but all courses of study leading to qualifications for pupils of compulsory school age are subject to the Secretary of State's approval, and their associated syllabuses are subject to the approval of his nominated body, the School Examinations and Assessment Council. As announced in the White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" the Government intend to use their reserve powers to extend these controls on standards to courses for 16 to 18-year-olds.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications for early retirement with enhancement have been approved and the costs met in part or in full by the teachers' superannuation fund in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Fallon: During the year ending 31 March 1991, a total of 781 teachers aged 50 to 64 were awarded benefits under the teachers' superannuation regulations following premature retirement from educational establishments in Wales.

Enhancement is a matter for employers, who are asked but not obliged to report details to the Department. Enhancement was reported in 560 cases, no enhancement was reported in 157 cases, and 64 cases were not reported.

Environmental Education

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has taken any action based on proposals made in the report of the business meeting on environmental education to which he referred in his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 27 June, column *533*.

Mr. Fallon: The report in question makes no specific proposals for action by the Department. It will, however, be brought to the attention of the committee which is being established to advise on the future development of environmental education within further and higher education.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration is being given to resolving the regulatory problems faced by on-site generators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Regulatory issues are a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply. I have however agreed to meet some members of the Combined Heat and Power Association to hear of their problems and ideas at first hand.

Coal Industry Pay

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, (1) what was the average wage from each area of the United Kingdom coal industry for *(a)* coalface-trained miners, *(b)* miners employed elsewhere underground and *(c)* surface workers in 1990-91;

(2) what was the average incentive and bonus pay in 1990-91 in each United Kingdom colliery;

(3) what was the average earnings for the year 1990-91 in each area of the United Kingdom coalfield.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Detailed information on average earnings, incentives and bonus pay is not kept by my Department. However, the two-year pay and benefits agreement introduced by British Coal in January this year puts mineworkers near the top of the industrial earnings league.

Fissile Material

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, whether, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, 27 June, column *516*, any nuclear material originally created in un-safeguarded reactors has been notified to the safeguards authorities as open to safeguards under INFCIRC-263.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There have been occasions when material originating from non-safeguarded reactors have been brought into safeguards. Such material has been notified to the safeguards authorities under INFCIRC 263.

Plutonium Exports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 27 June, column *517*, there have been any exports of plutonium to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in quantities of less than a few grammes in the past two years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I cannot for reasons of commercial confidentiality disclose the precise amounts of plutonium exported to individual countries. However, total exports of plutonium to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and its predecessors over the last two years have not exceeded 1 gramme.

IAEA Safeguards Budget

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment has been made of the increased demands on the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards budget of the decision by the Republic of South Africa to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This question will be considered as part of the agency's budgetary process.

PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister why he decided to require local authorities when setting their poll tax levels to cover the cost of unpaid poll tax bills; and if he has any plans to change this requirement.

The Prime Minister: As part of its budgetary process and in line with proper accounting practice, every local authority has to estimate the level of non-recoverable charges for the forthcoming year and then set a community charge which takes this into account. In this respect, the community charge is no different from the old domestic rating system.

Government Bills

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on recouping losses arising from the non-payment of Government bills from the subsequent payers of such bills.

The Prime Minister: Departments are advised in "Government Accounting", the Treasury's guide on accounting and financial procedures for Government Departments, that all reasonable action should be taken to effect recovery of losses.

Health Care Corporation Ltd.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister what legal costs have been contributed by Her Majesty's Government either directly or indirectly towards the legal costs of either party in the case of Regina *v.* Elmridge Borough Council, ex parte Health Care Corporation Ltd. and another.

The Prime Minister: In civil cases the costs are a matter for the parties involved. There has been no Government involvement in this case.

Holy Loch

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 17 June, *Official Report*, column 9, if he will make public those parts of the agreement between the United Kingdom and United States Governments to establish the United States Navy base at Holy Loch in 1960 which pertain to *(a)* civilian safety in the area; *(b)* the local community and *(c)* the local economy; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 17 June.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Part III Homes

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether residents of formal local authority part III homes, which are transferred to the private or voluntary sector between 25 June and when amending regulations regarding entitlement to income support take effect, will be eligible for higher levels of income support;

(2) whether residents of former local authority part III homes which were transferred to the private or voluntary sector before 25 June are eligible for higher levels of income support;

(3) whether residents of former local authority part III homes which are closed down are eligible for higher levels of income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Eligibility for income support is defined by regulations. Decisions regarding claims to benefit are made at a local level by independent adjudication officers who are provided with guidance on the interpretation of the regulations by the chief adjudication officer in the published adjudication officers' guide, a copy of which is in the Library.

The chief adjudication officer has recently issued advice to adjudication officers to help them decide claims from residents of homes which are transferred from local authority ownership to the private or voluntary sector pending the amendment of the regulations.

Where a local authority has accommodated a person under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948, responsibility for that person continues unless he no longer requires that accommodation. If a local authority home is closed the local authority would be under an obligation to find and pay for alternative accommodation for the residents.

Child Benefit

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policies on child benefit.

Mr. Jack: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has confirmed on a number of occasions recently, child benefit is and will remain a strong element in the Government's policies for family support. Child benefit rose by £1 a week for the eldest eligible child in each family in April, and will rise by a further £1 a week for the eldest eligible child in each family in October, with an extra 25p a week for other children. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his Budget statement, the Government are committed to increasing the new rates of child benefit in line with the movement in the retail prices index each year, starting in April 1992. We will announce in the uprating statement the allocation of the individual amounts between the eldest eligible child and other children.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms Certificates

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many certificates were valid in the Metropolitan police area for *(a)* firearms and *(b)* shotguns by division for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not available by division, but for the whole of the Metropolitan police area it is as follows:

Certificates on issue at 31 December each year

	Firearms	*Shotguns*
1979	9,504	[1]—
1980	9,374	28,990
1981	8,981	29,528
1982	8,856	28,504
1983	8,741	29,747
1984	8,878	30,293
1985	8,957	[2]37,147
1986	9,084	41,814
1987	9,036	44,299
1988	8,877	45,835
1989	8,615	43,436
1990	[2]9,929	42,362

Notes

[1] Figures for shotgun certificates on issue on 31 December 1979 are not available.

[2] Computerisation of records of shotgun certificates in 1985 and firearm certificates in 1990 brought to light previous under-recording.

Source: Annual Reports for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 1979 to 1990.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *168*, if he will make a statement on the progress of the review of guidance to local authorities on emergency planning procedures.

Mr. John Patten: Mr. David Brook, the civil emergencies adviser, is preparing guidance on preparing for and responding to peacetime disasters. This guidance will be based on the lessons learnt from recent disasters and the experiences of those involved. It will complement the emergency procedures manuals prepared by the emergency services. The guidance will not be issued until all those agencies upon whose responsibilities it touches, including local authorities, have been consulted about its contents. This process is currently under way.

Home Office guidance aimed solely at local authorities, currently contained in the "Emergency Planning Guide to Local Authorities", will be revised in the light of the outcome of the review of emergency planning announced on 16 October at column *769*.

Jury System Reform

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has plans to bring forward proposals for reform of the jury system.

Mr. John Patten: We do not rule out further reform of the jury system, but there are no present plans for legislation.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: All office telephones in the headquarters buildings of the Department have a bar to restrict access to premium rate services. The same bar is being progressively introduced to the provincial offices and into prison establishments.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his replies to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon), *Official Report*, 24 June, column *355*, on terrorism in Northern Ireland, if he will set out the reasons why the information requested is not available; and if he will make it his policy to ensure such information is made available in future.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is not available because police forces do not in general make information from custody records available to anyone but the suspect or his or her legal representative. However, a forthcoming study by the Home Office research and planning unit is likely to show that out of the 214 suspects who were detained in England and Wales between 22 March 1989 and 11 November 1990 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in connection with Northern Ireland terrorism, 95—45 per cent.—requested notification under section 56 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and notification was delayed for over 36 hours in six cases; and that 103—48 per cent.—requested access to legal advice under section 58 of the Act, which advice was delayed for over 36 hours in eight cases. Legal advice was delayed for the full 48 hours permitted by the Act in only one case. There were no cases in which notification under section 56 was delayed for 48 hours.

Mr. King Obe Quoi

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to answer the letters of 23 February, 28 April and 17 May from the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, regarding Mr. King Obe Quoi and his family; what are the reasons for the delay in providing a reply; what is the usual time taken by his Department to reply to a Member about an urgent constituency case; what action he is taking to deal with such cases with greater expedition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 4 July. The delay in replying is a direct result of the tenfold increase in the number of applications for asylum being received by the asylum division since 1988 and the heavy workload of subsequent inquiries from applicants and hon. Members which has been generated. The Home Office would normally expect to provide hon. Members with a reply within 16 days. However, exceptional difficulties prevail in the asylum division. On 26 April my right hon. Friend announced our intention to increase the number of staff in the asylum division from about 120 to more than 500. This process has begun and should in due course improve the division's ability to respond more quickly to hon. Members' inquiries.

Migration

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in each of the last 25 years, or for as many years as he has information, *(a)* emigrated from Britain and *(b)* immigrated to Britain; and for each year what was the net position.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available data on migration to and from the United Kingdom are the estimates produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys from the international passenger survey. This defines a migrant as a person leaving one country where he/she has been resident for more than a year with the intention of residing in a new country for a year or more. These data include British citizens and are on a different basis from the figures of people subject to immigration control accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom. Data for 1964-89 are given in table 2.1 of the 1974, 1979 and 1989 issues of the OPCS publication "International Migration", copies of which are in the Library. Corresponding data for the 12 months ending 30 September 1990 are given in the table.

Migration to and from the United Kingdom in the 12 months ending 30 September 1990

Number of persons, in thousands[1]

	Inflow	*Outflow*	*Net inflow*
All citizenships	257	219	37
British citizens	107	132	−25
Non-British citizens	150	88	62

[1] Figures are provisional estimates, and have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Underground Facility, Drakelow

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has for the use of the underground facility at Drakelow in Wyre Forest; and what is the annual cost of maintaining this facility.

Mr. John Patten: The facility has been developed as an administrative centre for use in a possible emergency. Running costs for 1990-91 were £122,000.

Criminal Records

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to have completed the process of the computerisation of the national collection of criminal records; and whether from that time it will be possible centrally to vet applications from individuals seeking to become licensed taxi drivers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The police national computer holds information on the convictions of those whose first reportable offence occurred after 31 December 1980. This information is available on-line to police forces. Plans to computerise earlier records which are held on microfiche at the national identification bureau, New Scotland Yard, have not yet been finalised. Records of convictions for other offences are held by police forces.

Criminal records have recently been the subject of a scrutiny which examined arrangements for, and the scope of, a fully computerised national criminal records system and the use of such a system for the purposes of vetting. The scrutiny recommendations are currently being considered and no decisions have been made on a national criminal record system or the purposes for which it may be used.

EC Frontier Controls

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *215*, to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), if he will make a further statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Schengen agreement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have nothing to add to the earlier answer to which the hon. Member refers in the question.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

IAEA Publications

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the "Inventory of radioactive material entering the marine environment: Sea disposal of radioactive waste", document IAEA-TECDOC-588, published by the International Atomic Energy Agency in March.

Mr. Curry: We already have one.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the total number of confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy by county or region, in England, Scotland and Wales for the period 1 January to 30 June.

Mr. Gummer: The information, calculated by date of confirmation of disease, for the period 1 January to 30 June 1991, is as follows:

Country, region and county	*Confirmed number of cases*
England	
Cleveland	9
Cumbria	212
Durham	29
Humberside	37
Northumberland	40
Tyne and Wear	2
Yorkshire North	358
Yorkshire South	28
Yorkshire West	40
Total: Northern region	755
Cheshire	318
Derbyshire	156
Hereford and Worcester	155
Lancashire	242
Leicestershire	205
Manchester	17
Merseyside	3
Nottinghamshire	51
Salop	200
Staffordshire	147
West Midlands	4
Warwickshire	87
Total: Midlands and Western region	1,585

Country, region and county	Confirmed number of cases
Bedfordshire	29
Cambridge	26
Essex	40
Hertfordshire	34
Lincolnshire	67
Norfolk	176
Northants	84
Suffolk	108
Total: Eastern region	564
Berkshire	45
Buckinghamshire	84
Hampshire	297
Isle of Wight	72
Kent	150
London	8
Oxon	111
Surrey	63
Sussex East	116
Sussex West	219
Total: South East region	1,165
Avon	201
Cornwall	683
Devon	1,061
Dorset	762
Gloustershire	219
Somerset	989
Wiltshire	568
Total: South West region	4,483
England total	8,552
Wales	
Clwyd	155
Dyfed	457
Glamorgan Mid	20
Glamorgan South	16
Glamorgan West	4
Gwent	59
Gwynedd	24
Powys	86
Total: Wales	821
Scotland	
Borders	26
Central	6
Dumfries	73
Fife	15
Grampian	53
Highland	16
Lothian	6
Orkney	2
Shetland	1
Strathclyde	75
Tayside	20
Total: Scotland	293

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the total numbers of confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy *(a)* in England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales up to 30 June.

Mr. Gummer: The information up to 30 June 1991 is as follows:

	Number
England	28,024
Scotland	976
Wales	2,401

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the pesticide active ingredients for which the agro-chemical companies are not submitting data for review, giving the year of their initial approval; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Agro-chemical companies have, so far, taken commercial decisions not to submit data for review in respect of 20 pesticide active ingredients:

Active ingredient	Date of first approval
Aluminium Silicate	1969
Anthraquinone	1962
Barban	1980
Benzethonium Chloride	Pre 1986
Carbophenothion	1966
Chlorthiamid	1962
2, 4-DES	1968
Di-allate	1978
Ditalimfos	1974
Fenchlorphos	1975
Fenoprop	1965
Flamprop-methyl	1980
Fluoroacetamide	1980
Mevinphos	1980
Oxine Copper	1961
Quinonamid	Pre 1979
2, 4, 5-T	1962
Tar acids	1970
Thionazin	1981
Thiourea	1983

Approval for the advertisement, sale, supply, storage and use by the approval holders—and their agents—of pesticides based on these active ingredients was revoked on 1 March 1991. Since no safety concerns relating to approved uses of these pesticides have been identified, approval for up to two years has been given to allow stocks already on the market to be used or disposed of safely.

Where necessary, action will be taken to revoke approvals for any products where reasonable steps are not taken to support continuing use.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now make a further statement in respect of his assessment of the current nuclear weapons potential of Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is clear that, prior to the Gulf conflict, Iraq was trying to develop a nuclear weapons programme. United Nations Security Council resolution 687 required Iraq to submit to the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency details of its nuclear weapons usable material.

Iraq made two initial declarations, which gave some of the information required, but were deficient in some

respects. The IAEA, with the special commission set up in accordance with resolution 687, is working to verify these statements and to remove nuclear weapons usable material from Iraq.

Kuwait (British Citizens)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations to ensure that compensation is paid to British civilians who were in Kuwait at the time of the Iraqi invasion; and when he expects the first payments to be made.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom representative at the United Nations is working actively with other members of the United Nations Security Council on arrangements for establishing a United Nations compensation commission and fund as envisaged in UNSCR 687 and UNSCR 692. The governing council of the commission is to be based in Geneva. It is not yet possible to indicate when the first payments will be made.

Kurdistan

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), *Official Report*, 24 June, column *349*, on allied forces in Iraq, if he will seek to obtain the information requested.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to supply a reason to Members on each occasion his Department is unable to provide a substantive answer to future questions.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is already our policy to do so.

Lebanon

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote the implementation of United Nations resolution 425 concerning the withdrawal from southern Lebanon of the occupying Israeli army, following the recent activity of the Lebanese army in re-establishing government control in and around Sidon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We strongly support the efforts of the Lebanese army to impose their control. Their success further strengthens international calls, which we have consistently supported, for Israel to withdraw from Lebanon in accordance with UNSCR 425. It is most important that neither the Israeli defence forces, nor their surrogates, do anything to impede the Lebanese army.

Information Services

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *350*, how he determines whether the market information inquiry service and the overseas status report service are being run at a profit or loss.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Provisional estimates of the cost of supplying the range of charged information services to exporters suggest that these services are heavily subsidised at present. Work is currently in hand to identify the costs involved in the Department of Trade and Industry in the United Kingdom and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office overseas in providing individual services. Our aim, in the longer term, is for our pricing structure to evolve to a position where charges and costs are aligned as far as possible, consistent with continuing to provide a high quality service to serious United Kingdom exporters that they regard as good value for money.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accountancy Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 23 May, *Official Report*, column *627*, if he has any plans to propose legislation under which the bodies acting as recognised supervisory bodies will be required to publish the number of complaints which they receive against their members.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans for such legislation. Under the Companies Act 1989, a recognised supervisory body must have effective arrangements for the investigation of companies against persons who are eligible under the body's rules to be appointed company auditor.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will propose legislation under which auditing firms could be required to explain audit failures to representatives of shareholders and creditors.

Mr. Redwood: No. Shareholders can already seek explanations of audit work at AGMs, and if they are unhappy can change the auditor. A company already has means of legal redress against negligent auditors.

EC-EFTA Negotiations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the expected timetable for the completion of the EC negotiations with the European Free Trade Association.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Council on 29 June endorsed the Community's commitment to work with EFTA to try and complete the negotiations on the European economic area this month, with the objective of enabling the agreement to enter into force on 1 January 1993.

ICI

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek to pay an official visit to the ICI factories at Pontypool, Penrhyndeudraeth and Barry.

Mr. Lilley: I have no present plans to visit these factories.

Egypt

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the hon. Member for Uxbridge concerning unfair

competition in trade with Egypt resulting from subsidies provided by the United States of America via its bilateral aid programme; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has received representations about alleged unfair competition from the United States of America in connection with a business contract in Egypt. We are looking into these allegations as a matter of urgency and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Insolvency Service has now achieved a full realisation of the cash and estate accounting records up to 31 March.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* No. The Insolvency Service now estimates that work on the cash and estate accounting records to 31 March 1991 will be completed by end of July 1991. However, flowing from the problems outlined by the Comptroller and Auditor-General in his report on the insolvency services account for 1989-90 relating to the old accounting systems and the transfer of estate records to the new system, a full reconciliation may not be achievable. I have asked the inspector general and chief executive of the Insolvency Service, who is the agency accounting officer for the account, to let the hon. Member have a further report at end-July. In the meantime, the inspector general is advising the Comptroller and Auditor-General of the position. The new system is succeeding in eliminating many of the problems apparent in the old.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what is the average penalty imposed in the cases taken by the Insolvency Service; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The Department of Trade and Industry prosecutes a variety of offences following investigations by the Insolvency Service. Such prosecutions comprise offences for which, on conviction, both custodial and non-custodial sentences are imposed. It is therefore not possible to calculate an average penalty.

Every decision to prosecute is taken with legal advice and the lawyer will have regard to the code for Crown prosecutors issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. That code, in addition to providing criteria as to the sufficiency of evidence, contains criteria concerning whether the public interest requires a prosecution. One of the criteria is the likely penalty, and it is stated that the prosecutor should carefully consider how best the public interest would be served where a nominal penalty is likely.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last reviewed the code for Crown prosecutors regarding the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* Any revision of the code for Crown prosecutors is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions under section 10 of The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985.

The Insolvency Service has guidelines which, when read with the code for Crown prosecutors, gives more detailed guidance regarding the investigation of possible offences in insolvencies. These guidelines were reviewed by Ministers in June 1991.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the annual cost of the Insolvency Service in Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Official receivers' offices located in Yorkshire are at Leeds and Sheffield. The running cost budgets for this financial year 1991-92 for those offices are £884,000 and £468,000 respectively.

The official receiver, Hull, and the official receiver, Stockton, also have responsibility in parts of Yorkshire. The running cost budgets for 1991-92 for those offices are £454,000 and £312,000 respectively.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Building Societies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when it was decided to propose legislation to obtain additional tax from building societies for the financial year 1985-86; and when and how an estimate was published of the financial effect on total tax receipts and on the tax to be paid by societies;

(2) what was the best estimate of the revenue effect at the time it was decided to propose legislation to obtain additional tax from building societies for the financial year 1985-86.

Mr. Maples: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given to him on 15 April, at columns *9-10*, and 22 April, at columns *300-1*. The 1986 legislation changing the way building societies account for tax on interest and dividends paid did not involve additional tax.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table of Inland Revenue statistics for each year since 1985, showing the schedule for composite rate tax on building society interest for each year since 1980-81.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The information requested is shown in the table:

Composite rate tax on building society interest

All amounts in £ million

	Receipts in									
	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
IRS edition in:										
1985	Not shown separately									
1986	Not shown separately									
1987	1,217	1,425	1,583	1,550	1,844	2,608	2,545	—	—	—

	Receipts in									
	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
1988	1,217	1,425	1,583	1,550	1,844	2,608	2,539	2,694	—	—
1989	1,217	1,425	1,583	1,550	1,844	2,608	2,539	2,694	2,686	—
1990	1,217	1,425	1,583	1,550	1,844	2,608	2,539	2,694	2,678	3,713

Note: Receipts of tax subsequently repaid as the result of decisions by the courts are included.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish indices of Welsh, Scottish and United Kingdom planned total spending, excluding privatisation receipts and the reserve, since 1978-79, with 1978-79 = 100.

Mr. Mellor: Indices for identifiable planning total expenditure—excluding privatisation proceeds—in Wales, Scotland and the United Kingdom for the years 1985-86 to 1989-90 are set out in the table. The figures for the United Kingdom are based on the part of the planning total—about three quarters—which could be allocated to individual territories. The data on which the indices are based reflect the planning total outturn at the time when the data were collected for the 1990 territorial analysis of expenditure. Corresponding data for 1984-85 on a consistent basis could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Data for other years are not available.

	Wales	*Scotland*	*United Kingdom*
1985-86	100·0	100·0	100·0
1986-87	109·7	106·4	107·4
1987-88	117·6	112·7	113·7
1988-89	126·0	118·3	118·9
1989-90	133·4	127·5	127·6

Horse Racing

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to prevent British companies making large investments in horse racing and bloodstock from writing down this investment to zero in one year for tax purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: It is not clear what sort of investment my hon. Friend has in mind. However, if he can provide further details I shall be glad to consider his question again.

Customs and Excise

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into Her Majesty's Customs and Excise since its reorganisation on next steps lines; and give a breakdown by grade of the number of staff taking up each new working pattern.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs and Excise have for some time used a variety of alternative working patterns, in particular part-time working, job sharing and fixed-term appointments, and will continue to do so following its reorganisation into executive units. I regret that detailed information on numbers and grades can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Servants

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil service grade 6 officers there were in each year since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Figures for the number of civil servants by grade from 1984 to 1990 can be found in table 4 of "Civil Service Statistics". Copies of this publication are held in the Library. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Unified grade 6 was created on 1 January 1984 as part of an expanded open structure by the assimilation of the senior principle grade and some equivalent grades. Published figures for the period prior to that date refer only to senior principal and since since 1984 further grades have been assimilated to UG6. Figures for UG6 on a consistent basis could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Telephones in my Department are already barred from connection to premium rate services.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the liquidation of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Mr. Maples: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral statement I made earlier today.

Tax Assessments

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much assessed tax on income in 1989-90 had been assessed by 31 July 1990.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The amount of tax assessed on income in 1989-90 by 31 July 1990 cannot be ascertained, as the Inland Revenue keeps records by reference to the collector's accounting year ending in October.

P11D Forms

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many P11D forms were outstanding on the most recent date for which this information is available.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* There were 1·15 million P11D forms on hand on 13 June 1991. The bulk of these forms are received in the first part of the tax year and dealt with in a targeted programme finishing in December.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Horn of Africa

41. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent progress has been made in ensuring aid arrives at the destination where needed in the Horn of Africa with the minimum of delay.

Mrs. Chalker: The established relief routes in northern Ethiopia continue to deliver food to those in need. In northern Sudan the relief routes are operational. Problems persist over the provision of food to southern Sudan and to those parts of Ethiopia still affected by conflict. However, new mechanisms, including air drops, are being introduced to deal with pockets of acute need.

European Community Aid Policy

42. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average percentage of gross domestic product spent on overseas aid in other EC member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Figures are available only for those member countries of the European Community which are also members of the development assistance committee of the OECD. The overall average percentage of gross national product given in overseas aid by these seven countries, excluding the United Kingdom, was 0·56 per cent. in 1989.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what facilities exist to discuss overseas aid with EC counterparts; and what proposals are envisaged for the development of a single EC policy on aid.

Mrs. Chalker: I have regular meetings with my EC colleagues on all aspects of aid policy. I have just returned from an informal Development Council which met in the Netherlands over the weekend. A wide range of issues was discussed.

Animal Conservation Schemes

44. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what animal conservation schemes are currently under consideration for financing by his Department.

Mrs. Chalker: Several possible projects are under consideration, in which animal conservation will be an important element. They include the following:

Bangladesh: study of impact of flood control on aquatic ecology.
Bhutan: management Plan for Jigme Dorji wildlife sanctuary.
Brazil: conservation of flooded forest areas.
India: wetlands conservation in Manipur valley.
Indonesia: conservation adviser.
Nigeria: development of Gashaka Gumpti game reserve.

Zimbabwe

45. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subjects were discussed during the Minister for Overseas Development's visit to Zimbabwe.

Mrs. Chalker: I had separate meetings with His Excellency the President and a number of his senior Ministers. The subjects we covered included arrangements for the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe's economic reform programme, our bilateral aid and other matters of mutual concern and interest to our two Governments.

"Farewell to the Third World"

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response his Department has made to the report by the export group for the construction industries "Farewell to the Third World", a copy of which has been sent to the Minister for Overseas Development.

Mrs. Chalker: Our response to the Export Group for the Construction Industries referred to the clear statement of ODA's strategy in the 1991 departmental report to Parliament (Cm. 1502), the importance of supporting economic reform in many developing countries, the good record of British contractors in gaining business from bilateral and multilateral aid, and the continued real-terms growth in the aid programme.

Nicaragua

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what bilateral aid Her Majesty's Government have given to Nicaragua since President Violetta Chamorro took office.

Mr. Chalker: We started a bilateral technical co-operation programme in March 1990; this is now running at about £200,000 a year. We subsequently pledged £600,000 of grant aid as part of the international effort to help restore the Nicaraguan economy. Since Mrs. Chamorro took office we have made commitments totalling £260,033 for six new NGO projects in Nicaragua. Our largest financial contribution continues to be through the British share of European Community assistance to Nicaragua; there are no figures yet available on this for 1990.

The Gulf (Medical Aid)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what United Kingdom medical aid is being given to Kuwait and Southern Iraq.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave on 17 June at column *32*. We are keeping the situation under close review.

Bangladesh

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the grants made by Her Majesty's Government to Bangladesh through the Bangladesh aid consortium since 1972 was devoted to programmes designed *(a)* to protect coastal areas from cyclone damage and *(b)* to prevent flooding within Bangladesh.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The Bangladesh aid group is a forum for discussion of

Bangladesh's development policies and financing requirements, at which donors indicate their aid intentions. It is not a mechanism for channelling aid, which is provided on a bilateral basis.

British aid statistics do not separately identify the amounts spent over past years on cyclone or flood protection. Since the 1989 Bangladesh flood conference we have committed £4·5 million towards the cost of studies identified as part of the flood action plan. Under that plan work on cyclone protection is also being undertaken with finance from the European Community.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

31. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to meet the director of the Serious Fraud Office to discuss company crime; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I shall next meet the director very soon, when we shall of course discuss commercial fraud among any other matters of departmental interest.

WALES

Health Provision

13. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the health authorities in Wales to discuss health provision in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I met health authority chairmen on 31 January and hope to do so again in the autumn.

14. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will next be meeting the chairmen of the health authorities to discuss the future of the health service in west Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend hopes to do so in the autumn.

Employment Statistics

15. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the change in the level of unemployment during the year to May 1991 in *(a)* Neath and *(b)* Wales as a whole.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of unemployed claimants in the Neath constituency and Wales increased by 731 and 29,043 respectively in the year to May 1991.

16. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the number of unemployed males and females in May 1989 and 1990 in Ogmore, Mid Glamorgan and the present recorded number.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is as follows:

	Ogmore constituency	*Mid Glamorgan*	*[1]South Wales*
May 1989			
Male	2,045	15,406	47,679
Female	656	4,992	16,150
May 1990			
Male	1,801	13,952	41,929
Female	497	3,784	11,964
May 1991			
Male	2,533	19,620	59,019
Female	621	4,788	14,630

[1] South Wales is defined here as Mid, South and West Glamorgan and Gwent.

18. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many men and how many women, showing full and part-time separately, were in employment in January 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available, in Wales and Mid Glamorgan.

Mr. David Hunt: Employees in employment data below national level is available only in census of employment years. The following table therefore shows data for June 1978—the nearest to January 1979—and the latest available—September 1989—containing both Mid Glamorgan and Wales:

Thousands

	Mid Glamorgan	*Wales*
June 1978		
Male full-time	106·6	587·9
Male part-time	3·3	25·3
Female full-time	48·8	249·6
Female part-time	27·5	152·5
September 1989		
Male full-time	79·8	484·5
Male part-time	4·1	37·2
Female full-time	44·7	255·2
Female part-time	36·4	209·8

Inward Investment

17. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proportion of inward investment projects attracted to the United Kingdom which have resulted in jobs created in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Wales continues to attract very significant levels of inward investment from overseas. The recent announcement that Sony was to create 1,400 jobs at a new manufacturing facility at Bridgend and Northern Telecom etc. is further evidence that Wales is now one of the most attractive locations in Europe for internationally mobile investment.

Secondary Schools

19. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1978-79, at constant prices.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In 1989-90 current expenditure per pupil in secondary schools in Wales was £1,817. The equivalent constant price figure for 1978-79 was £1,243.

Heart Disease

20. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress in combating coronary heart disease in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In May 1991 the Department published comprehensive and authoritative advice to the

NHS in Wales entitled "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain: Cardiovascular Diseases" which has been well received.

In addition, the Heartbeat Wales programme, which is run by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales, continues to combat the high incidence of coronary heart disease in Wales. The authority has distributed advice to GPs and other health professionals on the management of blood cholesterol levels and is organising seminars to outline cholesterol guidelines. Preliminary evaluation of the first five years of the Heartbeat Wales programme shows encouraging trends with smoking and excess drinking decreasing and more people in Wales taking exercise.

Residential Care Homes

21. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether residents in private nursing homes in Wales are eligible for free NHS services including chiropody and physiotherapy.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Under the Registered Homes Act 1984, the person responsible for a private nursing home is required to provide adequate support services such as physiotherapy. Consequently, health authorities would not normally provide such services to patients in such homes.

The Government's policy on chiropody is that treatment should be available under the NHS, free to all who need it. However, it is for the individual health authority to decide the level of provision required in its area and detailed priorities within available resources.

Local Government Reform

22. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales from which organisations he has received representations so far concerning local government reform in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received written or oral representations from the Assembly of Welsh Counties, the Council of Welsh Districts, the Wales Association of Community and Town Councils, members of the Conservative party, Plaid Cymru, and the Liberal Democrat party, a number of individual local authorities and councillors. I have also received a large number of letters from members of the public.

European Co-operation

23. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the authorities in Baden-Württemburg, Rhône-Alpes, Catalonia and Lombardy during the coming six months to discuss economic co-operation.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department and the Welsh Development Agency are actively pursuing practical links with all these regions. I have already visited Rhone-Alpes and plan to visit Baden-Württemberg later this year. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has visited Lombardy and plans to visit Catalonia later this year.

Employment Initiatives

24. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new initiatives he plans to announce to help the unemployed.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment recently announced a substantial package of additional measures to help unemployed people back into work. This includes expert advice and help in looking for a job, extra training and a new work experience programme—employment action. This new package, together with the wide range of programmes already in place, amounts to the most comprehensive range of measures we have ever had to help unemployed people back to work.

A5 (Dualling)

25. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proposed dualling of the A5 across Ynys Môn.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Following the public consultation exercise last October we expect to make an early announcement of the preferred route for the dualling of the A5 across Ynys Môn. The preferred route for the Holyhead improvement was announced last November and design work is proceeding with ground investigation and topographical surveys due to begin shortly. The A5 schemes are included in the Roads in Wales programme.

Engineering Qualifications

26. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people currently training for a British national technical engineering qualification *(a)* in Mid Glamorgan and *(b)* in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There were 505 students enrolled on Business and Technician Education Council engineering courses at higher education level in Mid Glamorgan in 1989-90, the last year for which figures are available. The corresponding figure for Wales was 2,516. At further education level the number of students enrolled was 558 for Mid Glamorgan and 3,497 for Wales.

Royal Welch Fusiliers

27. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the future of the Royal Welch Fusiliers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received 188 written representations and a petition containing 35 signatures calling for the continuation of the Royal Welch Fusiliers in their present form. I have also received a number of personal representations.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. It is my Department's practice to do so where it is technically feasible.

Dioxins and Furans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the maximum permissible levels and monitored levels of *(a)*

tetrachlorodibenzofuran, *(b)* tetrachlorodibenzodioxin, *(c)* pentachlorodibenzodioxin, *(d)* pentachlorodibenzofuran, *(e)* heptachlorodibenzofuran and *(f)* octachlorodibenzodioxin, respectively, in parts per million found in the Pontypool area; and what information he has regarding the risks of dioxins and furans to human health.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We have engaged the services of the university of East Anglia to undertake an in-depth survey to establish the levels of contamination by PCBs and their degradation products, dibenzo-dioxins and furans, in the Panteg area of Pontypool. The results of that survey will be available in about 18 months and will be widely published on completion.

We have also appointed Professor Lewis Roberts (former Wolfson professor of environmental risk assessment at the university of East Anglia) as our independent adviser for the survey. His role will be to advise us on the methodology and conduct of the survey and, at a later stage, to provide us with advice on its implications.

We have available to us pollution paper No. 17, "Dioxins in the Environment", which is a report of an interdepartmental working group on dioxins and furans. The conclusion of the working group is that a number of adverse health effects have been noted following accidental and occupational exposure to these chemicals, most commonly chloracne. The committee noted that no deaths had been attributed to these chemicals.

The Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) has not found any convincing evidence of a link between exposure to these chemicals and cancer, but recommend a continuing review of the work being undertaken in this field.

Redundant Miners (Training)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the number of redundant British coal miners who have received training or retraining following redundancy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government do not identify separately the number of redundant miners who have received training or retraining on Government training programmes. However, since it was set up in 1984 British Coal Enterprise has helped over 500 redundant miners to receive training and helped to create nearly 9,000 job opportunities in Wales.

SCOTLAND

Appointees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the annual cost of reimbursements and fees to each of his appointees to agencies, commissions and boards for each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Table 1 shows the annual remuneration at 1 July 1990 to my appointees in paid appointments. Table 2 provides the same information in respect of appointments made jointly with other Ministers. Information for previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies" published each year since 1982 and available in the Library, lists the public bodies to which appointments are made, including the remuneration paid.

Information on expenses paid to members of such bodies is not held centrally.

Paid appointments for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible as at 1 July 1990
Table 1

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990
	£
ARGYLL AND CLYDE HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	16,005
AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	13,415
BORDERS HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	10,810
CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE	
Chairman	15,000
7 Members	4,500
CENTRAL SCOTLAND WOODLANDS LTD.	
Chairman	Fee Paid
COMMISSION FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNTS IN SCOTLAND	
Chairman	7,939
Deputy Chairman	5,030
6 Members	2,500
2 Members	2,650
COMMON SERVICES AGENCY FOR THE SCOTTISH HEALTH SERVICE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	
Chairman	12,355
COUNSEL TO SECRETARY OF STATE ON PRIVATE LEGISLATION PROCEDURE	
1 Member	10,994
1 Member	7,568
COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND	
Chairman	15,365
Deputy Chairman	6,422
CROFTERS COMMISSION	
Chairman	36,848
6 Members	9,393
CUMBERNAULD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy Chairman	7,804
7 Members	3,525
1 Member	3,735
DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	10,810
EAST KILBRIDE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy Chairman	8,272
5 Members	3,525
2 Members	3,735
FIFE HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	13,415
FORTH VALLEY HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	13,415
GLENROTHES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	
Chairman	18,202

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990
	£
Deputy Chairman	7,804
8 Members	3,525
GRAMPIAN HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	18,250
GREATER GLASGOW HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	22,730
HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT BOARD (replaced by Highlands and Islands Enterprise from 1 April 1991)	
Chairman	56,540
Deputy Chairman	52,130
1 Member	46,695
1 Member	41,500
3 Members	8,123
HIGHLAND HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	13,415
HORSE RACING BETTING LEVY APPEAL TRIBUNAL FOR SCOTLAND	
2 Members	109 per day
IRVINE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	
Chairman	18,202
Deputy Chairman	8,272
7 Members	3,735
LANARKSHIRE HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	16,005
LIVINGSTON DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	
Chairman	17,172
Deputy Chairman	8,272
5 Members	3,525
2 Members	3,735
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND	
Chairman	4,691
Vice Chairman	11,122
3 Members	1,573
LOTHIAN HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	20,490
ORKNEY HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	6,510
PRELIMINARY REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR LIFE SENTENCE PRISONERS	
3 Members	varied daily fees paid
RED DEER COMMISSION	
Chairman	15,173
RENT ASSESSMENT PANEL FOR SCOTLAND	
President	12,471
Vice President	7,863
SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL WAGES BOARD	
Chairman	137 per day
3 Members	87 per day
SCOTTISH DENTAL PRACTICE BOARD	
Chairman	33,991
SCOTTISH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (replaced by Scottish Enterprise from 1 April 1991)	
Chairman	38,836
Deputy Chairman	19,665
5 Members	5,330
SCOTTISH HOMES	
Chairman	30,719
Deputy Chairman	13,957
7 Members	5,330
SCOTTISH HYDRO-ELECTRIC PLC (no longer Secretary of State's appointments)	
Chairman	39,750
3 Members	4,860
3 Members	60,000
1 Member	79,700
SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD	
Chairman	17,170
14 Members	8,529
SCOTTISH POWER PLC (no longer Secretary of State's appointments)	
Chairman	66,900
4 Members	4,860
1 Member	66,000
1 Member	63,000
1 Member	57,000
1 Member	54,000
SCOTTISH SEED POTATO DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL	
Chairman	7,110
SCOTTISH TOURIST BOARD	
Chairman	28,048
5 Members	5,330
SCOTTISH TRANSPORT GROUP	
Chairman	64,610
Deputy Chairman	12,922
1 Member	6,804
3 Members	5,184
SHETLAND HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	6,510
STATE HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	
Chairman	11,955
TAYSIDE HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	18,250
WESTERN ISLES HEALTH BOARD	
Chairman	6,510

Paid appointments made jointly by Secretary of State for Scotland and other Ministers as at 1 July 1990
Table 2

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990
	£
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DISTINCTION AWARDS	
Chairman	21,450
Deputy Chairman	7,900
AGRICULTURAL TRAINING BOARD	
Chairman	6,589
Deputy Chairman	6,041
BRITISH WOOL MARKETING BOARD	
3 Members	5,675
CRIMINAL INJURIES COMPENSATION BOARD	

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1990
	£
Chairman	22,650
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF ELECTRICITY SUPPLY	71,000
FOOD FROM BRITAIN	
Chairman	30,000
Deputy Chairman	4,290
1 Member	4,290
9 Members	1,895
2 Members	1,804
HOME GROWN CEREALS AUTHORITY	
Chairman	15,441
Deputy Chairman	5,330
19 Members	2,660
HORTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL	
Chairman	21,138
Deputy Chairman	3,830
20 Members	25 per day
INTERVENTION BOARD FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE	
Chairman	5,477
MEAT AND LIVESTOCK COMMISSION	
Chairman	45,453
Deputy Chairman	22,465
1 Member	10,840
9 Members	5,330
NATIONAL RADIOLOGICAL PROTECTION BOARD	
Chairman	9,310
12 Members	66 per day
SEA FISH INDUSTRY AUTHORITY	
Chairman	25,490
10 Members	5,330
UNITED KINGDOM SEEDS EXECUTIVE	
Chairman	6,689
4 Members	2,382

Enterprise Budgets

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the alterations made to the budgets of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise since the publication of "Meeting Scotland's Needs"; and what directions were given about the spending of those additional sums.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The alterations made to the budgets of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise which are subsequent to the determination of the figures published in "Serving Scotland's Needs"—Cm 1515—are set out in the tables.

Scottish Enterprise

Amount of adjustment (£ million)	*Date announced*	*Activities supported*[1]
+ 9·1	2 February 1991	Enterprise Environment Employment Training Youth Training
+13·6	26 February 1991	Employment Training
+15·0	10 May 1991	Industrial and Environmental Renewal in Lanarkshire
+10·1	19 June 1991	Employment Training Employment Action
+47·8[2]		

[1] No formal directions were given to Scottish Enterprise regarding the additional sums, which were however allocated in support of the functions listed.

[2] The total gross budget of Scottish Enterprise for 1991-92 is now £454·748 million.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Amount of adjustment (£ million)	*Date announced*	*Activities supported*[1]
+ 0·4	—[2]	Enterprise
+ 1·75	8 February 1991	Employment Training Youth Training Enterprise Training Administration
+ 1·4	26 February 1991	Employment Training
+ 0·6	19 June 1991	Employment Training Employment Action
+ 4·15[3]		

[1] No formal directions were given to Highlands and Islands Enterprise regarding the additional sums, which were however allocated in support of the functions listed.

[2] Amounts allocated to Highlands and Islands Enterprise in respect of Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance and Agricultural Development Programme following publication of Serving Scotland's Needs.

[3] The total gross budget of Highlands and Islands Enterprise for 1991-92 is now £74·878 million.

NHS Management

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the study commissioned by the Scottish management executive into the perception of health service staff on the contribution made by general management to the running of the national health service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The management executive is charged with improving the performance of the NHS in Scotland in serving patients. This task is informed by users' and staffs' perceptions of the service. No formal reports exist.

GP Budget-holding Practices

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the management fee for the pilot scheme, general practitioner budget-holding practices, of size *(a)* 3,000 to 6,000 and *(b)* 6,000 to 8,000.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The same administrative tasks are undertaken by all practices involved in fund holding, regardless of their list size. The standard management allowance will therefore be available to those practices that participate in the smaller list size pilot scheme. The standard management allowance currently stands at £16,500 during the preparatory period and £33,000 per annum when fund holding commences.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Mr. Lang: The vast majority of telephones in my Department are at present barred from connection to premium rate services. There are some telephones, however, which are connected to equipment which is not technically capable of individual call barring at present.

AIDS

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the membership and terms of reference of the AIDS task force for Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased to announce that the following persons have agreed to serve on the task force, which I shall chair:

Dr. G. E. Bath—Consultant in Public Health Medicine and AIDS Co-ordinator, Lothian Health Board.
Dr. J. S. Berkeley—Consultant in Public Health Medicine and AIDS Co-ordinator, Grampian Health Board.
Mr. J. Chant—Director of Social Work, Lothian Region Council.
Mr. J. Christie—Deputy Director of Education, Tayside Regional Council.
Professor F. Edwards, Director of Social Work, Strathclyde Regional Council.
Dr. L. Gruer—Consultant in Public Health Medicine and AIDS Co-ordinator, Greater Glasgow Health Board.
Dr. D. H. Kennedy—Consultant Physician, Greater Glasgow Health Board.
Mr. A. M. Macpherson—Scottish Advisory Committee, National AIDS Trust.
Mrs. M. Moore—Director, Scottish AIDS Monitor.
Dr. K. A. M. Porter-Boveri—Consultant in Public Health Medicine and AIDS Co-ordinator, Tayside Health Board.
Dr. J. R. Robertson—General Medical Practitioner, Muirhouse Medical Group, Edinburgh.
Mrs. J. Roulston—Projects Manager, The Aberlour Child Care Trust.
Dr. A. Tannahill—General Manager, Health Education Board for Scotland.
Miss A. Thomson—Clinical Nurse Specialist, Greater Glasgow Health Board.

The terms of reference of the task force are as follows:

In the light of existing and emerging data on the incidence of HIV and AIDS in Scotland:
—to review current activities to prevent the spread of the virus;
—to consider what further practical measures might be taken; and
—to access the effectiveness of the present arrangements for co-ordination of action at national and local level.

I am confident that the task force, which will meet for the first time on 19 July, will make a significant contribution to our efforts to tackle the problem of HIV and AIDS in Scotland.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when, following the recent completion of the review into environmentally sensitive areas, he expects to be in a position to announce further designations of environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* My right hon. Friend's first priority has been to consult on proposals for development of existing environmentally sensitive areas designated in 1987 and to evaluate those designated in 1988. He hopes to build on their achievements. There are no plans, currently, to designate new environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland. However, the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland have been asked for advice on priorities should further designations be decided in the future.

Salmon Farming

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Scottish salmon farming industry is on the agenda at the forthcoming meeting of the Fisheries Council of the European Commission on 8 July; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The Scottish salmon farming industry is not on the formal agenda for the Fisheries Council next week. However, United Kingdom Ministers will certainly be raising our concerns with the Commission and other Fisheries Ministers at that time.

Training (Employment Contracts)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many youth training and employment training people had contracts of employment in December 1990 in Scotland; and how this was calculated.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 5 July]:* I regret that this information is not available.

ENVIRONMENT

Minister for London

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received seeking the appointment of a Minister for London within the Department.

Mr. Heseltine: Several.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will use the information collected in the 1991 census in his calculations to determine standard spending assessments for local authorities in the financial year 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Information from the 1991 census will be incorporated into standard spending assessments (SSAs) as soon as possible, allowing for proper consultation and discussion with local authority representatives. Information for individual local authorities will not be available until the summer of 1992.

Greenwich Borough Council (Finance)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the London borough of Greenwich about the calculation of the council's standard spending assessment; and what reply he has given.

Mr. Key: The London borough of Greenwich has made a number of representations on its standard spending

assessment and has on a number of occasions discussed these matters with local government Ministers. All the issues raised have received most careful consideration.

Lone Parent Households

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how dated is the information for each local authority on the proportion of children in lone parent households used in assessing standard spending.

Mr. Key: The most up-to-date information, which is consistent and reliable at local authority level, is used throughout standard spending assessments. In the case of the proportion of children in lone parent households this is information from the 1981 census.

London Boroughs (Loan Debt)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the loan debt for each London borough for each year since 1979.

Mr. Key: The outstanding loan debt for each London borough for 1983-84 to 1989-90 is given in the table. The figures relate to outstanding loan debt as at the end of each financial year. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Outstanding loan debt for London boroughs: 1983-84 to 1989-90

£ million

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Barking and Dagenham	90·796	91·597	94·641	128·796	130·475	134·434	116·499
Barnet	168·662	167·530	179·125	203·094	216·509	213·112	n.a.
Bexley	105·807	111·556	116·195	136·309	139·596	124·624	139·525
Brent	329·510	347·212	379·385	n.a.	444·069	467·566	462·458
Bromley	120·007	119·202	118·970	167·851	173·606	151·918	165·270
Camden	523·704	558·684	585·574	658·361	672·604	676·274	689·516
City of London	246·562	245·621	235·975	232·952	202·205	68·045	55·679
Croydon	142·412	151·699	148·270	184·046	185·054	171·971	170·512
Ealing	263·253	274·688	282·009	301·698	315·160	n.a.	n.a.
Enfield	192·764	198·840	203·839	228·055	242·652	235·612	252·900
Greenwich	337·785	356·276	376·920	391·708	410·791	426·997	469·118
Hackney	368·901	400·131	427·820	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Hammersmith and Fulham	178·203	227·770	237·826	316·313	n.a.	n.a.	306·851
Haringey	391·505	421·275	458·089	509·071	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Harrow	107·549	123·380	133·241	139·389	180·165	189·685	200·719
Havering	114·815	119·789	128·366	156·992	164·144	158·936	169·607
Hillingdon	221·419	228·911	234·414	257·343	260·309	251·866	245·739
Hounslow	221·881	232·752	240·506	267·551	283·263	304·448	310·041
Islington	560·469	n.a.	619·434	667·081	685·998	835·483	842·117
Kensington and Chelsea	247·803	252·758	254·861	293·992	263·625	263·173	266·744
Kingston-upon-Thames	68·048	73·113	70·372	78·655	93·068	95·157	94·763
Lambeth	410·736	528·882	686·885	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Lewisham	315·292	337·081	349·117	451·500	481·012	484·707	494·683
Merton	135·523	144·982	175·259	183·851	177·003	198·865	217·038
Newham	376·797	372·853	382·150	n.a.	507·068	518·949	546·055
Redbridge	115·537	133·887	111·487	164·684	157·495	n.a.	210·103
Richmond-upon-Thames	76·741	82·331	83·594	105·173	101·464	n.a.	108·314
Southwark	530·337	550·306	577·487	783·297	819·068	n.a.	n.a.
Sutton	86·107	87·157	86·742	100·565	99·652	105·716	113·585
Tower Hamlets	179·264	184·188	188·279	517·865	535·690	587·418	568·284
Waltham Forest	174·974	182·655	199·776	223·417	224·654	n.a.	n.a.
Wandsworth	321·192	334·683	346·155	433·070	459·064	467·999	492·421
Westminster	231·856	234·179	237·005	295·546	250·794	n.a.	n.a.

n.a. Not available.
Source: Returns to the Department.

Community Charge

Sir William Shelton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions govern the number of monthly instalments in which a local council may request their community charge must be paid.

Mr. Portillo: Our regulations provide that the charge is payable in 10 monthly instalments or, if less, the number of whole months remaining after the issue of the notice, less one. However, these regulations have recently been amended so that when a demand notice is issued in May the number of instalments offered may be 10 or nine. These provisions are contained in schedule 1 to the Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 (S.I. 1989 No. 438) as amended by the Community Charges and Non-Domestic Rating (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1991 (S.I. 1991 No. 1127).

Palace of Westminster (Buying Policy)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require those placing orders for capital equipment including catering equipment, in all parts of the Palace of Westminster, to buy British wherever possible.

Mr. Yeo: Yes, while at the same time observing international agreements on tariffs and trade.

Inner City Partnership Scheme (Hackney)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the annual allocations to the area of the London borough of Hackney through the inner city partnership scheme since its inception, and the projects supported.

Mr. Key: The annual allocations of urban programme resources to the London borough of Hackney, including the district health authority, are as follows:

Year	*Final allocation (£ million)*
1979-80	[1]11·800
1980-81	[1]15·400
1981-82	[1]15·000
1982-83	12·100
1983-84	12·500
1984-85	13·000
1985-86	12·000
1986-87	11·600
1987-88	10·750
1988-89	9·660
1989-90	6·269
1990-91	6·000
1991-92	5·585

[1]These allocations were to the Hackney-Islington joint partnership and are not directly comparable with the subsequent allocations to Hackney.

Individual projects started each year within the programme since 1985-86 are listed in annual reports available from the council.

Meetings with Local Authorities

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the meetings held by himself and other Ministers from his Department with local authority representatives over the past six months in each case showing *(a)* the date, *(b)* venue, *(c)* subject areas discussed, *(d)* Ministers present and *(e)* local authorities and their political control.

Mr. Heseltine: Ministers meet regularly with local authorities on a wide range of subjects.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he takes to ensure that council tenants are receiving equal treatment under the disabled facilities grant system; and what is the tenure breakdown of disabled facilities grant approvals.

Mr. Yeo: Council tenants may apply for disabled facilities grants on the same terms as owner occupiers and private-sector tenants, and the local authority must approve or refuse an application within six months of the date it is made. Information on the tenure breakdown of disabled facilities grant approvals is not yet available.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will consider adjusting regulations surrounding the test of resources for disabled facilities grants to enable the test to be applied solely to the disabled person for whom the adaptation is required;

(2) if he will consider adjusting the regulations surrounding the test of resources for disabled facilities grants to enable mortgage responsibilities to be taken into account.

Mr. Yeo: We have received a number of representations from local authorities, grant applicants and others on these matters and will be considering them as part of our review of the house renovation grant system later this year.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has for helping home improvement agencies extend the service previously provided to elderly people to younger disabled people.

Mr. Yeo: Under the new arrangements for funding home improvement agencies introduced on 1 April 1991, such agencies are being encouraged to help all those in need including younger disabled people.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to ensure all new houses are accessible to disabled people.

Mr. Yeo: We have done much in recent years to widen the field of organisations providing housing for the disabled, especially within the housing association movement. The Housing Corporation now requires all new build and, if possible, rehabilitation schemes to be built to mobility standards wherever practicable. We have also supported initiatives to encourage private-sector housebuilders to make it a priority that all new housing is built to be accessible to disabled people, to 'visitability' standard.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the figures of the fourth quarter on disabled facilities grant approvals and payments.

Mr. Yeo: This information is published in table 2·19 of "Housing and Construction Statistics: Great Britain, December Quarter 1990, Part 2". A copy of the table has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to meet the accommodation needs of carers of disabled people living independently in the community.

Mr. Yeo: Currently, it is for local authorities and individual housing associations to decide whether to take account of carers' needs when allocating tenancies to disabled people. However, from 1 April 1993, or sooner if local authorities are able, social services departments will be obliged to take account of carers' needs when assessing the needs of disabled people as part of the community care planning process.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has plans to consult organisations of and for disabled people in the forthcoming review of the disabled facilities grant system.

Mr. Yeo: Yes. Officials plan to meet a range of disability organisations shortly to discuss the operation of the new grants system. They will also be inviting written comments from disability groups with an interest in the review.

International Atomic Energy Agency Publications

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his Departmental library a copy of "Low Level Waste Disposal: An Evaluation of Reports Comparing Ocean and Land Based Disposal Options", Document IAEA TECDOC-562, published by the International Atomic Energy Agency in 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Yes.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Mr. Heseltine: Where telephone exchange equipment allows, all telephones in central DOE, including Property Holdings, have already been barred from connection to premium rate services.

Samuel Thomas Antonelli

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the activities of Samuel Thomas Antonelli and his company; and what action he has taken.

Mr. Yeo: We have had 39 representations from hon. Members and a few from leaseholders themselves since January 1988. The representations allege harassment and intimidation in various forms against leaseholders of properties whose freeholds are owned by the companies. The existing statutory framework is intended to protect leaseholders against abuse. Their rights under statute have been explained to them. We nevertheless intend to review the present position to see if any further action is necessary.

Quayside Developments

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been spent so far by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation on progressing *(a)* the Newcastle Quayside development in east Newcastle and *(b)* the Royal Quays development in North Shields.

Mr. Key: To 30 June 1991, £5·547 million had been spent by the Tyne and Wear development corporation at east Quayside, and £9·944 million at Royal Quays.

Planning Applications

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to revise the regulations governing fees for planning applications.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has today issued a consultation paper seeking views on several proposals to amend the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) Regulations 1989 (as amended). The paper covers three categories of proposal:

(a) amendments to the regulations which the Government undertook to make during the passage through Parliament of the Planning and Compensation Bill. These would remove the present 75 per cent. fee concession for a planning application which duplicates another submitted by the same applicant, and would double the fee for the deemed application which may accompany an enforcement appeal;

(b) small amendments to resolve practical difficulties which have come to light in operating the present regulations; and

(c) an invitation to consultees to suggest ways in which the present regulations might be simplified, possibly by restricting the scope of some of the existing concessions and exemptions from the fees.

The paper also refers to the Government's intention to propose a general increase in application fees. The requisite regulations would be laid before Parliament in the autumn and, if approved, could come into effect in January 1992.

Separate but parallel consultation is being carried out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pollution Control

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further consideration he has given to arrangements for pollution control.

Mr. Heseltine: The White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", Cm 1200, last year proposed a number of steps aimed at co-ordinating more closely the pollution control activities in England and Wales of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the National Rivers Authority. The Government have decided that the time is now right to go further by bringing together the related functions of HMIP and the NRA to create a new environment agency. As foreshadowed in "This Common Inheritance", the agency would also have responsibility for regulating the handling and disposal of waste—currently a local authority responsibility. The creation of this agency will be a major step forward. The agency will be a non-departmental public body with a board appointed by the Government. It will provide more effective pollution control through greater integration of the staff involved; produce a single body which will be simpler and easier for industry to deal with; and ensure that arrangements for enforcing pollution control remain strong and independent and are seen to be so. It will have responsibility for monitoring the state of air and water, as well as regulating waste disposal, making proposals to Government on standards and regulating emissions and discharges to achieve the standards set by Government. The new agency will not affect the present division of work between the pollution control agencies and the Health and Safety Commission/Executive. Primary legislation to set up the new body will be required. The development of detailed proposals will require close co-operation between my own and other Government Departments and the other interests involved. I am asking Lord Crickhowell, the chairman of the NRA, Dr. David Slater, chief executive of HMIP and the leaders of the local authority associations to work closely together and I shall make a further announcement shortly on arrangements for taking forward this work. I shall be issuing later in the year a consultation document setting out our proposals more fully. Meanwhile, the agencies involved will continue their existing work with the full backing and support of the Government.

Planning and Compensation Bill

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to advise local authorities of the provisions of the Planning and Compensation Bill; and on what date he expects the Bill to come into force.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* My right hon. Friend expects to make an order under clause 67 of the Planning and Compensation Bill appointing a day about two months after the date of Royal Assent on which many of the provisions of the Bill come into force. Different days will be appointed for those provisions which require subordinate legislation to be made before they can be operative. My Department will be issuing a general circular to local authorities before the first appointed day and further circulars and planning policy guidance notes will be issued as the provisions of the Bill are brought into force over the next year or so. My Department will invite comments on drafts of this guidance where appropriate.

Bass Site (Preston Brook)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance Bass at Preston Brook received from new town development corporations to locate, expand or restructure on the site.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* The former new town development corporation at Runcorn leased a 98-acre site to Bass in 1971. Subsequently some smaller associated sites were also leased to the company. In 1985 Bass purchased the freehold reversion of the site. Apart from certain infrastructure works carried out by the corporation in the normal course of opening up areas for development, I am not aware of any other assistance provided to Bass by the development corporation. I understand, however, that Bass received a regional development grant from the Department of Trade and Industry for its development at Runcorn.

HEALTH

European Private Patients Group

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of the European Private Patients Group in marketing NHS services in other European countries.

Mr. Dorrell: The European Private Patients Group presently consists of about 30 NHS hospitals across the country. The group is in the process of carrying out a feasibility study to see if the sale of NHS private patient facilities to other European countries is a viable opportunity, and the results should be available in the autumn.

If this venture goes ahead, the group plans to utilise spare capacity in NHS private patient wards and the consultants concerned would treat European private patients in their own time—that is, at times other than when they are contracted to work for the NHS. Profits from the scheme would be available to help fund NHS waiting list initiatives or other developments in local NHS services.

Natal Costs

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the costs of having a baby in a national health service hospital, ante-natal care, delivery costs and post-natal care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available, the average total cost per birth in the national health service was £1,170.

Medical Confidentiality

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take early steps to ensure that medical details relating to named patients are not disclosed in hospital invoices; and if he will propose legislation to make illegal breaches of confidentiality to or by accounts staff.

Mr. Dorrell: Medical details are encoded and means are being investigated for encrypting names in exchanges of data by computer and, in the longer term, eliminating the use of a name altogether. Strict procedures are already in place to protect confidentiality of personal health information by NHS staff and a breach of these is a disciplinary offence. Further legislation is unnecessary.

NHS Reforms

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all programmes currently under way designed to evaluate the national health service reforms introduced in April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The NHS management executive is undertaking an extensive programme of development work on the health service reforms. Its aim is to assess the effectiveness of alternative approaches to realising the full benefits of the reforms, to develop and disseminate good practice, and to identify any areas where action may be necessary to ensure that the desired effects of the reforms are achieved.

The Department has established a joint NHS review committee with the general medical services committee. This committee will undertake a joint evaluation of the general practitioner fundholding scheme and provide a means for the profession to put forward views on its future development.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what areas of local authority service provision for which he is responsible local authorities are empowered to make payments to individuals who are not employees *(a)* in the form of a grant or one-off payment and *(b)* on receipt of paid invoices.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the area of child care, local authorities have a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1980 to promote the welfare of children by diminishing the need to receive children into care or to bring them before a juvenile court. The assistance given under this Act is normally in the form of services, but, in exceptional circumstances, may be in cash.

RU486

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he granted a licence to the manufacturers of RU486 for sale and use of the drug in the United Kingdom; and if he will publish the conditions attached to the licence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The licence for mifepristone (RU486) was granted on 1 July 1991 as a prescription-only medicine with the following clinical indication:

Medical alternative to surgical termination of intra-uterine pregnancy of up to 63 days gestation based on the first day of the last menstrual period and/or ultrasound scan.

Its use is restricted to NHS hospitals and places approved by the Secretary of State under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967.

I have today placed copies of the company's data sheet in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration has been given by Her Majesty's Government to the provision of full funding for the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 27 June 1991]:* At a meeting on 26 March the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) acknowledged the need for improved scientific and technological advice to be made available to Members and gave instructions for questionnaires to be issued to all individual Members, and to select committees, in order to establish the extent of demand for services of the kind offered by Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology—POST.

Replies to these questionnaires are now being examined, and in the light of these the Committee will consider whether to proceed towards more detailed proposals for the funding of POST and, if so, what further information and evidence may be required to support such proposals.

Any recommendation from the Services Committee for the provision of substantial public funding for POST will of course need to be submitted to the House.

DEFENCE

HMS Onslaught

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the decommissioned submarine HMS Onslaught was disposed of; to whom; and for what purpose.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: HMS Onslaught was paid off from the active fleet at the end of December 1990. Invitations to tender have since been issued to prospective purchasers, but no decision concerning her final disposal has yet been taken.

The Gulf

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has of tanks and other military equipment deteriorating as a consequence of inadequate maintenance or protection while awaiting sea transport from Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. The condition of tanks and other equipment returning from the Gulf was consistent with their having been used on an operation in a harsh desert environment, but the great majority were fully operational.

HMS Endurance

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how long the structural survey to be carried out on HMS Endurance will take; and when the proposed structural survey on HMS Endurance is due to begin;

(2) when the last structural survey was carried out on HMS Endurance; and what were the results;

(3) for what reason the structural survey of HMS Endurance was not begun at an earlier stage of her current period in port.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Endurance is now 35 years old and is not built to the standards which would be required in a new ship for operation in ice. HMS Endurance has been subject to periodic structural surveys, but following the collision with an iceberg in 1989, which holed the ship and caused other structural damage, a system of full annual structural surveys was instituted. The last structural survey was carried out in 1990, following which the condition of the ship was judged acceptable for deployment to the Antarctic for the 1990-91 austral summer season. HMS Endurance returned from this deployment on 31 May and, following a period of leave and ship preparation, entered dock on 26 June. The 1991 structural survey commenced as planned on 1 July and initial results should be available within the next few weeks. The results of the survey will be considered in conjunction with the results now available of a metallurgical analysis of plate removed when the ship was repaired following the 1989 collision.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vessel is planned to replace HMS Endurance on ice patrol in the South Atlantic should the proposed structural survey prove her unsound.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Endurance is the only Royal Navy ship of suitable design for the ice patrol task. No decision has been taken on her replacement.

Guardsman Hicks

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the weekly income announced to the House on 1 July, *Official Report*, column 45, received by Guardsman Hicks, would have been paid to him as a result of his service and his unemployment, regardless of the injuries he sustained on the Batus firing range on 7 July 1989.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: About 16 per cent.

Defence Cuts

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the projected cash savings in the defence budget for 1992-93 and 1993-94 which will be achieved as a result of his projected cuts in the strength of the British armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cash plans for defence announced last autumn are being reviewed in this year's public expenditure survey in the light of the development of our plans for the restructuring of the armed forces. The level of funding required in 1992-93 and the two following years will be announced in the autumn statement.

Transportation of Explosive Materials

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has now reached a decision on whether future transportation of explosive materials to Ministry of Defence establishments will be by road rather than by rail.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The policy regarding the movement of explosive materials to Ministry of Defence establishments will not change. Where practicable and cost effective, movement of explosive materials by rail is the preferred option. However, there will still be a degree of movement of explosives by road when these criteria are not met.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has already taken technical and procedural measures to bar access to these services.

Royal Navy Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies exhibiting products or services at the Royal Navy equipment exhibition being held in Portsmouth in September.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is our practice not to provide such a list until the exhibition catalogue is published.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visitors are expected at the Royal Navy equipment exhibition in Portsmouth from 1 to 6 September.

Mr. Alan Clark: Based on previous attendances, we would expect a total of around 20,000 visitors.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of organising the Royal Navy equipment exhibition being held in Portsmouth from 1 to 6 September, including the salaries of the military personnel.

Mr. Alan Clark: All additional costs incurred in relation to the exhibition will be recovered from participating companies.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel will be on duty during the Royal Navy equipment exhibition in Portsmouth in September.

Mr. Alan Clark: One hundred and seventy-seven military personnel will be on duty during the Royal Navy equipment exhibition.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be opening the Royal Navy equipment exhibition in September.

Mr. Alan Clark: This has not yet been decided.

HMS Challenger

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the bids received for HMS Challenger; and when he expects the vessel to be sold.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not the practice of this Department to disclose details of bids which were submitted in commercial confidentiality. Marketing of HMS Challenger continues and it would be premature to give a date by which final sale may be expected.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Toxic Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research he has carried out on the comparative stringency of the controls on *(a)* toxic waste and *(b)* hazardous waste incinerators in (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) the rest of the United Kingdom, (iii) the other countries of the European Community, (iv) Canada and (v) the United States of America.

Mr. Needham: Published research information from around the world is, of course, available to the Government on incineration practices and controls and officials have visited facilities in other countries. Controls over waste incineration exercised in Northern Ireland must comply with the policy and standards of the United Kingdom which are governed by the requirements of the European Community.

Environmental Audit

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for which plants he intends to have an independent environmental audit carried out in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Environmental audits are to allow a company to examine its performance in terms of emissions to atmosphere, discharges to sewer and in the production and disposal of waste. There are no proposals for the Government to require independent audits of this nature.

Coronary Heart Care

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make it his policy to allocate resources to coronary heart medicine according to the extent of the problem; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what measures will be adopted to reduce the waiting list in respect of operations for coronary heart care in each of the health and social services boards.

Mr. Hanley: Cardiac surgery is, and will continue to be, a priority for the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland. The Government are well aware of the extent of heart disease in Northern Ireland and are committed to reducing the time that those requiring heart surgery have to wait for an operation. Over the past two years, significant additional resources of £300,000 have been invested to increase the level of operations. A capital scheme costing £1·5 million to extend the cardiac recovery area at the Royal Victoria hospital is due to be completed in October. This will permit the appointment of a fourth cardiac surgeon and supporting team and I recently announced that, as part of the development in regional medical services this year, a further £300,000 would be made available to meet the costs involved.

In the longer term, the Government are committed to working to reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease in Northern Ireland through health education and

promotion and several years ago launched the "Change of Heart" campaign. This 10-year programme is now being carried forward throughout the Province by the four health and social services boards.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have died as a result of heart problems in each of the health and social services boards in each of the last five years who were on a waiting list for a coronary heart operation.

Mr. Hanley: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently waiting for operations in respect of coronary heart care in each of the health and social services boards.

Mr. Hanley: All patients in Northern Ireland waiting for cardiac operations are included in a single cardiac surgery waiting list at the Royal Victoria hospital which provides the service for the whole of Northern Ireland. Separate waiting lists are not therefore maintained for each board. At 31 March 1991, the number of patients on the waiting list was 869.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current waiting time for operations in respect of coronary heart care in each of the health and social services boards.

Mr. Hanley: All patients in Northern Ireland waiting for operations for coronary heart care are included in a single cardiac surgery waiting list at the Royal Victoria hospital which provides the service for the whole of Northern Ireland. Separate waiting lists are not therefore maintained for each board. At 31 March 1991, the number of patients on the waiting list by waiting time was:

Months	*Number*
0-2	111
3-5	90
6-8	44
9-11	53
12-23	162
24+	409
Total	869

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many reported cases of BSE there have been in each of the last six months; how many cattle have been killed; and from what number of farms in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Month	*Reported "Suspect" Cases*	*Cattle Killed*	
		Number	*Farms*
January	23	21	20
February	21	17	17
March	13	18	18
April	15	8	8
May	18	12	11
June	22	14	14
Totals	112	90	88

In Northern Ireland there are some 1·5 million cattle in 26,000 herds.

Historic Monuments and Buildings

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the historic monuments and buildings which are registered by the historic monuments and buildings branch of the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland; indicating in each case whether they are *(a)* listed buildings, *(b)* owned and maintained by a public body, *(c)* otherwise protected or *(d)* unprotected.

Mr. Needham: As there are currently more than 7,800 buildings listed and 1,100 monuments scheduled by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, including 170 in the Department's care, it is not practical to provide the information as requested. However, the lists of buildings and monuments are open for inspection by the public at the offices of the historic monuments and buildings branch of the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland in Hill street, Belfast. All listed buildings are afforded a degree of protection by the Planning (NI) Order 1972 and scheduled monuments by the Historic Monuments Act (NI) 1971. Information on current ownership of listed buildings or monuments is not held in every case by the Department.

Strangford Lough

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the membership of the proposed executive committee and advisory committee for the management of Strangford lough will be subject to consultation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland in accordance with the provisions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Needham: No. Committees of this kind are not the subject of consultation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland under the provisions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

TRANSPORT

Stockport Bypass

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received representations from Stockport metropolitan borough council urging delay in the construction of the A6(M) Stockport north-south bypass.

Mr. Chope: No.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current timetable for the building of the A6(M) Stockport north-south bypass.

Mr. Chope: A start has been made on the diversion of some statutory undertakers apparatus. Subject to the satisfactory clearance of the remaining statutory procedures, work on the main contract should start in the spring 1993.

Motoring Offences

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will institute a system for recording the type and make of vehicles involved in motoring offences and road accidents and publish them periodically; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We published earlier this year the first of a new statistical series showing casualty rates by make and model of car—"Transport Statistics Report—Car and Driver: Injury Accident and Casualty Rates, Great Britain 1989", HMSO, May 1991. We have no plans to extend this to recording offences by vehicle make and model.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made concerning the compulsory fitting of speed governors to heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) on 4 July at column *174*.

Bypasses

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the provision of bypasses.

Mr. Chope: Bypasses are an important part of our commitment to civilising road transport. We know that they make a significant contribution to improving the quality of life in our towns and villages.

I am pleased to announce that we propose to add to the roads programme a further 15 schemes which are new or extended bypasses or related improvements, and three scheme identification studies, at a total cost of £85 million. The package includes new bypasses for Christleton and Waverton near Chester, Turvey in Bedfordshire, Kilkhampton in Cornwall, and Bishop Burton in Yorkshire. Other components are improved bypasses for Ilminster in Somerset, Guestling Thorn and Icklesham in East Sussex, Woofferton in Shropshire and Skeffington in Leicestershire. Studies will consider alternatives to the A40 through Cheltenham, and the possibility of relief for the A45 through the south of Coventry and for the A663 Broadway in Manchester.

The bypass programme has made a major contribution to improving urban conditions over many years. One hundred and three trunk road bypasses have been built in England since 1979 and over 170 are planned. Twenty-one are now under construction, with a further 19 due to start this financial year. In addition, since 1986-87, a total of 191 local authority bypasses supported by transport supplementary grant have been completed, 64 are under construction, and 30 more are due to start this financial year.

Bypasses in themselves achieve great environmental benefits by redirecting traffic to more suitable routes. A new bypass can have a much bigger impact on the quality of the local environment if complementary measures are implemented at the same time which take advantage of the fresh opportunities which arise if through traffic is removed or significantly reduced.

These opportunities can include the introduction of traffic calming measures, improved provision for pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users, landscaping and environmental enhancements.

Last year in the enviroment White Paper we announced our intention to set up demonstration projects in a number of towns to link the provision of a trunk road bypass with measures in the bypassed towns. I am pleased to announce that the towns selected for the demonstration projects are:

Berkhamsted
Dalton-in-Furness
Market Harborough
Petersfield
Wadebridge
Whitchurch

Local authorities responded enthusiastically to an invitation to nominate towns for the project, and it has not been easy to choose just six from the many interesting possibilities put forward. But the towns selected offer a good range of issues and opportunities, and in each case the local authorities already have proposals to build on the contribution being made by the trunk road bypass.

The bypass demonstration project will explore the possibilities in these towns, together with the local authorities, the Civic Trust and community interests. It will show what can be achieved in specific locations, and provide new ideas and useful guidance for the many local authorities whose towns will benefit from bypasses over the next few years.

Road Accidents

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the road accident fatality rates for Great Britain, other EC countries, the United States of America, Canada and Japan.

Mr. Chope: The fatality rates expressed as the number of fatalities per 100,000 population in 1988 are published in "Road Accidents Great Britain" and are set out in the following table.

Fatality rate per 100,000 population, selected countries: 1988

Country	*Rate*
Great Britain	9
Belgium	20
Denmark	14
France	21
West Germany	13
Greece	17
Ireland	[1]13
Italy	13
Luxembourg	23
Netherlands	9
Portugal	33
Spain	21
Canada	[1]16
Japan	11
USA	19

[1] 1987 figure.

Comparable fatality rates expressed as the number of fatalities per billion vehicle kilometres depend upon the availability of estimates of traffic in individual countries. Not all countries make direct estimates of road traffic, nor are the published estimates on a consistent basis. However, the Netherlands Road Safety Research Institute has recently published the following estimates:

Fatality rate per billion vehicle km, selected countries: 1988

Country	Rate
Great Britain	13
Belgium	36
Denmark	20
France	29
West Germany	19
Greece	72
Ireland	21
Italy	[1]26
Luxembourg	28
Netherlands	15
Portugal	106
Spain	83
Canada	15
Japan	23
USA	15

[1] 1986 figure.

Speedlink

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what services will be commencing on 8 July to replace Speedlink.

Mr. Freeman: From 8 July British Rail will be running 125 trains a day to replace the Speedlink wagonload and related trainload services. Tigerail will be running freight train services from Cornwall and from Hampshire to Scotland and British Rail will commence a container service from north-east Scotland to Glasgow on a trial basis. About 70 per cent. of the domestic Speedlink traffic has been retained on rail. British Rail will also be running dedicated services to the Dover train ferry from all principal industrial locations in Britain for European traffic. Eighty-five per cent. of existing train ferry traffic has been retained to encourage and build up European business prior to the opening of the channel tunnel. I very much welcome this achievement.

Cycle Lanes (London)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further progress has been made in implementing his policy of creating 1,000 miles of cycle lanes in London; and what is his policy regarding the creation of cycle lanes through royal parks.

Mr. Chope: Following the seminar hosted by my Department last November, a group of cycling officers from the London boroughs has been set up and continues to meet regularly with the object of co-ordinating the provision of cycle facilities in London.

The London planning advisory committee has endorsed the results of consultation with the boroughs on the 1,000-mile network and that information is being used to produce the maps of the network which will be ready for distribution to boroughs in the autumn.

I am discussing the provision for cyclists in the royal parks with my noble Friend the Minister of State, Department of the Environment.

Explosive Materials

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional safety precautions he intends to take to ensure the safe transport by road of explosive materials to Ministry of Defence bases.

Mr. Chope: The transport by road of explosive materials is subject to the Road Traffic (Carriage of Explosives) Regulations 1989 with which the MOD must comply. I have no plans to require additional precautions.

Transport Single Market

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to hasten the creation of a single market in transport in the European Community.

Mr. McLoughlin: The creation of a single market in transport is a key objective for the Government. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic attended the EC Transport Council in Luxembourg on 21 and 22 June and secured agreement to a directive on the development of Community railways which will allow access by individual rail companies to other member states' railway systems for the purpose of combined transport operations. In addition my right hon. Friend stressed the pressing need to fulfil the legal requirement to liberalise international road passenger transport, while my hon. Friend emphasised that progress had to be made on liberalising maritime cabotage.

The June Transport Council is but a recent example of the many meetings in which the Government have pressed our Community partners for more rapid movement in establishing a genuine single market in transport. The Luxembourg European Council on 20 June made a new series of commitments to liberalisation in the various transport modes.

London Buses

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations have been received on access and provision for disabled people in response to the consultation paper "A Bus Strategy for London".

Mr. Freeman: The consultation paper, "A Bus Strategy for London" did not deal specifically with the provision of bus services for disabled people. Nevertheless, a number of those who responded to the paper—including the hon. Lady—commented on this point. Their views have been fully taken into account. A statement on the conclusions reached following the consultation exercise will be made shortly.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to meet representatives of the Greater London Association of Disabled People to discuss the implications of bus deregulation for people with disabilities.

Mr. Freeman: I should be pleased to meet representatives of the Greater London Association for Disabled People to discuss their views on access to public transport for disabled people.

Energy Efficiency

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy in respect of the recommendations in paragraph 130 of the third report of the Select Committee on Energy on Energy Efficiency, HC91.

Mr. McLoughlin: A response to the Select Committee on Energy's recommendations on energy efficiency has been sent to the Committee. I understand that it will be published shortly.

Nuclear Waste (Accidents)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the incidents reported to the International Atomic Energy Agency under the auspices of the 1972 convention on the prevention of marine pollution by dumping of wastes and other matter, concerning accidents at sea involving radioactive materials *(a)* involved nuclear materials originating in the United Kingdom, *(b)* involved nuclear materials destined for the United Kingdom and *(c)* took place in or near to United Kingdom territorial waters; and if he will obtain a copy for his Department library of the IAEA report on these matters.

Mr. Mcloughlin: None of the incidents reported, concerning accidents during transport at sea, involved nuclear materials originating from or destined for the United Kingdom or took place in or near United Kingdom territorial waters. Several incidents have been reported, however, involving sealed radioactive sources, details of which have not yet been incorporated into the IAEA database. The Department has a draft copy of the IAEA report on these matters.

Newhaven-Dieppe Ferry Service

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will discuss with his French counterpart the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry service;

(2) what steps he is taking to secure the resumption and long-term future of the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry service.

Mr. Mcloughlin: The Newhaven-Dieppe ferry service has been suspended because of an industrial dispute between French seamen and the Sealink ferry company. Commercial negotiations are under way to resolve the dispute and the French authorities have appointed a mediator. It would not be appropriate for Her Majesty's Government to seek to become involved at this stage. We are, however, monitoring the situation closely.

Ships (Specifications)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British-registered ships are built to STAB 90 specifications.

Mr. Mcloughlin: The information is not available at the moment in the form requested. The damage stability characteristics of all United Kingdom roll on/roll off passenger ferries are being urgently assessed in accordance with procedures adopted by the International Maritime Organisation in May. The level of their compliance with STAB 90—SOLAS 90—specifications will be available when that exercise is complete.

Port Inspections

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the number of port state control inspections over the past 10 years, the percentage of inspections as a total of vessels using British ports in each year, and the number and percentage of ferries inspected using British ports in each year.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of foreign ships given port state inspections at United Kingdom ports from 1983 to 1990, and the numbers of inspections as a percentage of the numbers of foreign ships using United Kingdom ports in those years were:

Year	*Numbers*	*Per cent.*
1983	2,557	40
1984	2,529	39
1985	2,532	39
1986	2,439	32
1987	2,250	35
1988	1,839	30
1989	1,692	[1]27
1990	2,118	[1]34

[1] Based on the 1988 figure for ships visiting, which is the latest available.

Figures for earlier years are not available.

The number of inspections of foreign-registered roll on/roll off passenger ferries at United Kingdom ports from 1988 to 1990 were:

Year	*Number*
1988	136
1989	134
1990	82

Most foreign ferries were inspected twice in each of the three years and the numbers of inspections consequently exceed the numbers of such ferries available for inspection at our ports. The number of foreign ferries using United Kingdom ports varies considerably during the year. At March 1990, a total of 49 such vessels were operating. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Air Services (Gibraltar)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his present policy relating to the liberalisation of air services to and from Gibraltar.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of moves to liberalise air services arrangements in the European Community. It has been agreed within the Community that Gibraltar airport will be able to benefit from the EC liberalisation packages when the Gibraltar airport agreement is implemented.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are employed in Tower Hamlets on employment training schemes or other schemes operated through the training and enterprise council network.

Mr. Jackson: The table shows numbers of people employed on the main training programmes operated by the London East TEC, of which Tower Hamlets forms part.

LETEC—participants on TEC operated schemes at 24 May 1991

	Number
Employment training	3,153
Youth training	4,052
Enterprise allowance scheme	782

Note: LETEC covers Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Havering, Barking and Newham.

Chemicals Haulage

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the grades of officers involved in the recent north-west roadside check of lorries carrying chemicals; and whether this activity is part of the job descriptions of all the officers so employed on that day.

Mr. Forth: The following grades of staff in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) were involved in the Chemcheck North West exercise on 26 June:

Band B inspector
Band D inspector
Band E inspector
Band F inspector
Higher professional technical officer
Administrative officer

One of HSE's main objectives is to promote and secure compliance with relevant health and safety legislation and this extends to and includes the legislation that applies to the transport of hazardous substances or goods by road. All staff in HSE's field operations division are responsible for ensuring that this main objective is met and contribute either directly or indirectly by a variety of means including the inspection of work activities, enforcement, giving advice and information and the provision of clerical support. However, their job descriptions do not include specific reference to undertaking roadside checks on lorries carrying chemicals.

Labour Statistics

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in Tower Hamlets in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jackson: Employment estimates for local authority districts are available only from the censuses of employment taken in 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. Data for Tower Hamlets are given in the table below. The estimates relate only to employees in employment; they exclude the self-employed and also members of Her Majesty's forces.

Employees in employment in Tower Hamlets

September each year	*Numbers (000s)*
1981	84·3
1984	81·1
1987	96·3
1989	104·0

Employment Schemes (Hackney)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the annual allocations to the area of the London borough of Hackney through his Department's special employment and inner cities schemes since their inception, and the projects supported.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department's programmes are not allocated to its regions on the basis of local authority boundaries, and it is not therefore possible to provide the information requested. All Employment Department programmes are available in urban programme areas, including Hackney.

Pregnant Workers

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress was made on the draft directive on the protection of pregnant workers at the Council of Ministers' meeting on 24 and 25 June; what were the voting figures on the directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave on 4 July to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell).

Youth Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the companies formerly members of the national training providers unit which have withdrawn from the provision of youth training.

Mr. Jackson: The following companies which formerly contracted through my Department's TECs and national providers unit have withdrawn from the provision of youth training: ASDA Stores Ltd, B and Q plc., Dairy Crest Ltd., Habitat Designs Ltd., Newey and Eyre Ltd., Whitbread and Co. plc (Hotel and Catering), Wolsley Centres Ltd., and Woolworths plc. This represents only a small percentage (5 per cent.) of those national organisations currently delivering youth training through local contracts with training and enterprise councils.

Employment Statistics, Congleton

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently unemployed in Congleton; and what percentage these figures represent of the local work force.

Mr. Jackson: In May 1991 the number of unemployed claimants, not seasonally adjusted, in the Congleton parliamentary constituency was 1,403 males and 654 females.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been employed in Congleton in each of the past 12 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: Employment estimates for parliamentary constituencies are available only from the censuses of employment taken in 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. Data for the Congleton constituency are given in the table below. The estimates relate only to employees in employment; they exclude the self-employed and members of Her Majesty's forces.

Employees in employment in Congleton

September each year	*Numbers (thousands) Males*	*Females*	*All*
1981	n.a.	n.a.	27·7
1984	15·3	11·8	27·1
1987	17·3	13·2	30·5
1989	17·8	14·2	32·0

n.a. = Separate estimates for males and females are not available for 1981.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by what percentage and by what numbers unemployment in Congleton has risen over the past 12-month period.

Mr. Jackson: In the parliamentary constituency of Congleton, unemployment, not seasonally adjusted, increased by 769 or 59·7 per cent. in the 12 months to May 1991.

Training for Disabled People

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the training of disabled people.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 11 June at column *776* to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke).

Industry Training Organisations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made in the work of industry training organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The White Paper, "Employment for the 1990s" (Cmd 540), set out the roles that were expected of industry training organisations (ITOs) in the national training framework. It also announced that there was to be a review of progress in each industry sector.

The results of this independent review are now available. I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library. The findings point to the level of performance having generally improved since the last review in 1987. There was evidence of greater commitment within sectors to the key tasks of ITOs, particularly to the development of occupational standards that underpin national vocational qualifications and their Scottish equivalents. The researchers took the view that the training system continues to need a network of effective industry training organisations in order to operate, and the Government are happy to endorse that conclusion. We shall be examining the detailed recommendations made in the report to see how we can help in improving the effectiveness of these independent organisations.

The Government welcome this endorsement of our approach to sector-based training of removing the compulsion and bureaucracy of the statutory system and replacing it with voluntary arrangements.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 July 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Attorney-General how much was claimed under *(a)* the legal advice and assistance scheme and *(b)* legal advice and assistance in respect of (i) immigration cases, and (ii) asylum cases in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

The Attorney-General: Separate information is not available for the cost of legal advice and assistance for immigration or asylum cases. However, the amounts that were paid for advice and assistance, under the legal aid "green form" scheme for all immigration and nationality cases are set out in the table.

	£
1988-89	781,532
1989-90	1,681,960
1990-91	2,652,727

Legal aid is also available for judicial review proceedings concerning immigration and asylum cases, but separate figures for the amount spent are not available.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Attorney-General whether he has received the Director of Public Prosecutions' report on the Crown prosecution service for the year 1990-91; and when the report will be laid before Parliament.

The Attorney-General: I have received the annual report from the Director of Public Prosecutions today, and have placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Woolwich Tax Model

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham of 2 July, when counsel, other than by affidavits, challenged the conclusions of the tax model in each court.

Mr. Maples: As I made clear in the answer to which my hon. Friend refers, the challenge to the conclusions of the tax model was contained in the affidavits which were put in evidence in all the courts up to the House of Lords.

Guest Houses

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the numbers of Inland Revenue inspectors to ensure that all guest houses which should register for uniform business rates are encouraged to do so.

Mr. Maude: There are no plans to increase the numbers of Inland Revenue staff specifically to deal with this matter. However, Her Majesty's Government aim to ensure that staff will be maintained at the level required to enable the valuation office to carry out its statutory duties.

Customs and Excise

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of all bonus schemes in operation in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise executive units.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs have one bonus scheme in operation in their executive units—the special bonus scheme. Special bonuses are used to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations. They take the form of taxable, non-pensionable lump sum payments. The overall cost for running the scheme in each executive unit is restricted to 0·2 per cent. of the pay bill.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise executive units since the reorganisation along next steps lines; and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to the introduction of executive units.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise set up 30 executive units on 1 April 1991. Their key performance indicators, expressed in aggregate for the 21 collection executive units, including those relating to quality of service, are listed in the published Customs and Excise management plan for 1991-92 to 1993-94. The previous year's management plan similarly identifies quality of service indicators operative prior to the introduction of executive units. Copies of these plans are in the House Library. The overall number of quality of service indicators more than doubled from 1 April 1991.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those new facilities for staff such as nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise since its reorganisation on next steps lines.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is developing its "Look After Your Heart" campaign and seminars for liaison officers from executive units are planned in September. The views of managers and staff are currently being sought towards a more positive departmental policy on smoking at work. Health screening exercises are being undertaken in two locations with another planned. A staff assistance programme is being developed, which will make health care advice available throughout the Department and stress management awareness training available where necessary.

Customs and Excise participates in 25 play schemes. The latest, in Glasgow, opens on 8 July. The Department's first on-site nursery was opened in Wembley in February and has facilities for 20 children. A further 20 places have recently been secured in a private nursery in Southend. Three other on-site nurseries are planned.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the last annual report for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise was published; and when the next one is due.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The report for the year ending 1989-90 was published on 10 October 1990. The report for 1990-91 will be published in October.

Inland Revenue Inspectors

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of Inland Revenue inspectors for each year since 1979.

Mr. Maude: The table sets out the total numbers of Inland Revenue staff in the Department's inspector grades at 1 April for each year since 1979.

	Number
1979	6,551
1980	6,561
1981	6,516
1982	6,396
1983	6,379
1984	6,530
1985	6,462
1986	6,572
1987	6,852
1988	7,116
1989	7,512
1990	7,816
1991	8,155

Departmental Bills (Payments)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he proposes to extend his Department's standing instructions to all Government Departments on the timing of the payment of bills to small businesses and local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The standing guidance to Government Departments on the timing of the payment of bills, which is set out in "Government Accounting", the Treasury's guide on accounting and financial procedures, does not apply to the payment of bills by local authorities, which are responsible for their own policy in this matter.

Small Businesses

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has completed his investigation of the treatment of small businesses by the banks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: My officials and officials at the Bank of England are looking at banks' interest rates and charges to small businesses, and how lending policies are being applied. Once the facts have been fully established and considered, a statement will be made in due course.

Child Care

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he accepts the estimates provided by the Campaign for Tax Relief on Child Care of the costs and benefits to the Exchequer of extending tax exemption to all legal employer-assisted child care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The Government do not accept the TRAC estimates as they are based on a number of questionable assumptions about the likely behavioural response to extending tax relief for child care, and appear to take no account of some relevant factors.

Public Information

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the reference numbers of documents held in the file T160/763/F14755; and if he will, in each case, state the other file or files in which copies are retained.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The Treasury has found no record which would enable it to establish what documents were on the file or what reference numbers, if any, they may have had.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Parliamentary Groups

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds his Department grants annually to *(a)* the Franco-British parliamentary group, *(b)* the British-German parliamentary group and *(c)* the British-American parliamentary group; and when these amounts were last revised.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek a debate in the UN on the report by Michael Priestly on the health consequences to Iraq of continued international sanctions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN Security Council will conduct its next review of the sanctions on imports by Iraq in August, as provided for in Security Council resolution 687. The Council's discussions will no doubt be informed by the findings of the UN mission led by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan which is currently visiting Iraq.

Non-proliferation Regimes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report prepared by Zachary S. Davis of "The Congressional Research Service on Non-proliferation Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Policies to Control the Spread of Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Weapons and Missiles", released on 1 April by the United States Library of Congress.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes.

Falkland Islands

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much land in the Falklands is now owned by Falkland islanders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: With the recent purchase by the Falklands Islands Government of four farms previously owned by the Falkland Islands company, Falkland islanders, or their Government, now own about 95 per cent. of land in the islands.

Gabon and Congo

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he proposes to make for the protection of British interests in Gabon and Congo after the closure of British embassies in those countries.

Mrs. Chalker: Following the decision earlier this year to close our embassies in Libreville and Brazzaville, the Governments of Gabon and Congo have been informed of our intentions and both embassies will close by the end of July. The protection and promotion of British interests in these countries will in future be the responsibility of the British embassy in Kinshasa. Accreditation will shortly be sought for our ambassador in Kinshasa to be concurrently ambassador (non-resident) in Gabon and Congo.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Curriculum Council

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums have been expended to the latest available date by the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council on the printing and circulation of its guidance material to the teaching profession.

Dr. Mawhinney: To the end of June this year, the cost of publication and distribution of guidance materials produced by the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council to the teaching profession was £182,365.

Intergovernmental Talks

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who will chair the third strand of the talks involving the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland Governments and the constitutional political parties of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the statement that I made in the House on 3 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 319-20.

As the talks that were held on the basis of my statement of 26 March 1991 have now concluded without the third strand having commenced, this question does not arise.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relates to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[Holding answer 3 July 1991]:* The Government remain committed to developing care in the community. The regional strategy for the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland and the recent policy paper "People First", which charts the way forward for community care in the 1990s, both identify improvements in attitudes and services which need to be made to enhance the quality of life for disabled people. They both stress the importance of assessing individual people's needs and targeting services to help them to live in their own homes for as long as possible and to participate fully in the life of the community.

Stemming from "People First", the Department of Health and Social Services has recently issued detailed guidance requiring health and social services boards, from 1 April 1991, to put in place new complaints procedures which will ensure the formal investigation of all complaints or representations about community care services made by individuals or by anyone on their behalf. From April 1993, comprehensive assessment arrangements will be introduced covering the community care needs of all people who are vulnerable through aging or disability. The guidance on complaints procedures required boards not only to publish the new arrangements but to ensure that any relevant information is made available in an appropriate format to sensorily handicapped or homebound people. The guidance on assessment and care management will similarly be publicised and, in providing for the appointment of a representative of the disabled person, will enable any problems in communication faced by the disabled person to be addressed.

Government support was given to the introduction of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 on the understanding that it would be brought into effect in stages as resources permitted. On 1 April 1991, sections 5 and 6 of the Act and parts of sections 4, 8 and 11 were brought into force. These provisions require health and social services boards to assess the needs of disabled people for certain social welfare services, and the ability of their carers to provide appropriate care. Boards are also required, in association with education and library boards, to ensure that young disabled people have a smooth transition from full-time education to adult life. Substantial resources have been made available to boards to enable them to implement these provisions.

With the introduction of these sections, Northern Ireland is now fully in line with Great Britain as far as the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 is concerned. The intention is to maintain this position of parity.

Of the provisions of the 1989 Act still to be brought into effect, sections 1 and 2 provide for the appointment of an authorised representative either by the disabled person concerned or by the relevant health and social services board. Section 3 requires the relevant board to give a disabled person or his authorised representative the right to make representations about his need for services, to provide on request a written statement on the assessed need for services and to respond to representations about any such statement.

The implementation of these sections has been overtaken by the wider developments in the community care field. In particular, the far-reaching proposals in "People First" embody the spirit of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Act. These, and the other broadly-based developments described above, reflect the Government's continuing drive towards substantial improvements in community care services in Northern Ireland and its commitment to provide the resources necessary to achieve this goal.

Recommendations on public transport

The Government have a strong policy commitment to improve transport facilities for disabled people in Northern Ireland. The Transport (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990 enables the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland to grant aid the provision of transport services and facilities for the disabled. The Government fund and are represented on the transport advisory committee set up by the Northern Ireland Council on Disability. The Government will also subsidise dial-a-ride operations in Northern Ireland, initially for north and west Belfast. Ulsterbus/Citybus and Northern Ireland Railways are working to improve the accessibility of public transport services to the disabled

through suitable facilities at bus and rail stations and the provision of appropriate features on buses and rolling stock.

Recommendation on Access

The Northern Ireland building regulations dealing with facilities for disabled people are currently being revised. The proposals will be issued for consultation later this year. They will be based on those currently being finalised in England and Wales which cover all new public buildings and some extensions, including many of the categories of buildings mentioned in the manifesto such as leisure and recreational facilities, health service centres, and also shops, libraries, and so on.

The training and employment agency in Northern Ireland provides an employment assessment, guidance, training and placement service for people with disabilities. The service has recently been reorganised with the introduction of a disablement advisory service. Disablement employment advisers, based throughout Northern Ireland, provide local facilities and develop links with area health and social services boards for the progression of people with disabilities from medical rehabilitation to employment-related services. They actively promote good employment practices with employers and, wherever possible, seek to provide employment and training opportunities alongside able-bodied workers.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Terms

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much time is spent in school by children in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Japan, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* France.

Mr. Fallon: International comparison cannot be precise. The figures in the table compare the number of hours of weekly attendance at school and the number of weeks in the school year.

	Weekly hours of attendance		*Length of school year*
	Primary	*Secondary*	
England and Wales	26½-30 (samples)	28½-31 (samples)	38 weeks
France	27 (minimum)	24 (minimum)	33 weeks
Germany	Up to 36	Up to 36	40 weeks
Japan	25-29	30	35 weeks minimum

Science and Engineering Research Council

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the closing dates for applications for postgraduate awards from the Science and Engineering Research Council in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The closing date for receipt of nominations for postgraduate awards funded by SERC is 31 July. This date applies whether the student is to study in Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the United Kingdom, providing that he or she is eligible for a SERC award. The student must satisfy eligibility criteria on both qualifications and residence.

The SERC residence criterion refers to postgraduate students ordinarily resident in Great Britain. Support for students ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland is provided by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, DENI—not SERC. The DENI closing date for receipt of applications for its awards competition is 1 May for students wishing to study in Great Britain, and 1 August for those wishing to study in Northern Ireland.

Schools (Barnet)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children are educated in voluntary aided *(a)* infants, *(b)* junior and *(c)* high schools in Barnet; and how many pupils are educated in (i) Church of England, (ii) Roman Catholic and (iii) Jewish voluntary-aided schools in Barnet.

Mr. Fallon: The number of pupils in Barnet educated in voluntary-aided schools is given in the table, by type and denomination of school. The figures relate to January 1990, the latest date for which information is available.

Barnet LEA
Pupils in voluntary aided schools by type and denomination

Type of School	*Number of pupils*
Infant Schools	616
Junior Schools	734
Junior and Infant Schools	5,637
Secondary Schools	6,676
Total pupils in Barnet in voluntary aided schools	13,663

By Denomination	*Number of Pupils*
Church of England Schools	4,753
Roman Catholic Schools	6,493
Jewish Schools	1,826
Other Schools	591
Total pupils in Barnet in voluntary aided schools	13,663

Special Needs

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in rank order the amount spent by each local education authority on special needs *(a)* as an amount per pupil-student and *(b)* as a proportion of total local education authority expenditure on education.

Mr. Fallon: Returns from local education authorities identify separately their expenditure on special schools, home and hospital tuition, child guidance and educational psychological services. However, those returns do not show separately the amount spent to meet the special needs of pupils in primary and secondary schools and of further education students.

For 1988-89, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available, table 1 indicates spending on those items which are separately indentified as an amount per pupil in special schools. Table 2 indicates that spending as a proportion of total local education authority expenditure on education.

Table 1

Special Needs: Net recurrent expenditure[1] per pupil[2]

Local Education Authority	£
Bexley	16,460
Croydon	15,480
Solihull	15,040
Merton	14,940
Barking	14,890
Ealing	14,830
Enfield	14,630
Harrow	14,630
Brent	13,160
Cumbria	12,660
Redbridge	11,940
Bury	11,880
Barnet	11,690
Richmond-Upon-Thames	11,410
Cornwwall	11,220
Havering	10,580
Norfolk	10,480
Avon	10,380
Rotherham	10,290
Hounslow	10,240
Hillingdon	10,040
Wolverhampton	10,020
Somerset	9,970
Bradford	9,840
Newham	9,810
Suffolk	9,690
Derbyshire	9,640
Bromley	9,460
Berkshire	9,450
Wiltshire	9,350
St. Helens	9,120
Kingston-Upon-Thames	9,090
ILEA	9,090
Essex	9,020
Kirklees	9,000
Gloucestershire	8,980
Bolton	8,950
Leicestershire	8,950
Sutton	8,900
Cheshire	8,880
Northumberland	8,770
Hertfordshire	8,730
Sheffield	8,630
Rochdale	8,550
North Yorkshire	8,540
Barnsley	8,530
Wirral	8,470
Oxfordshire	8,470
Cambridgeshire	8,450
South Tyneside	8,390
Nottinghamshire	8,350
Tameside	8,310
Humberside	8,300
Dorset	8,260
Wigan	8,040
North Tyneside	8,020
Durham	7,830
Hampshire	7,780
Northamptonshire	7,760
Shropshire	7,760
Lancashire	7,700
Sandwell	7,660
Waltham Forest	7,650
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	7,470
Staffordshire	7,440
Buckinghamshire	7,420
Surrey	7,370
Bedfordshire	7,350
Gateshead	7,330
Dudley	7,290
Lincolnshire	7,270
East Sussex	7,170
Cleveland	7,140
West Sussex	7,060
Devon	7,040
Coventry	7,010
Warwickshire	6,960
Trafford	6,950
Birmingham	6,850
Sefton	6,790
Oldham	6,430
Sunderland	6,430
Walsall	6,380
Kent	6,380
Calderdale	6,350
Leeds	6,140
Stockport	6,110
Knowsley	6,100
Liverpool	5,880
Hereford and Worcester	5,750
Salford	5,570
Isle of Wight	4,910
Doncaster	4,520
Haringey	N/A
Manchester	N/A
Wakefield	N/A

Notes:

(1) Excluding financing costs of capital expenditure, school meals, income from specific grants and central education department administration costs.

(2) The figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DOE and pupil number returns to DES. N/A denotes that an expenditure return has not been received for an LEA.

Table 2

Local education authority	*Net recurrent expenditure[1]: special needs as a percentage of total education spending[2] Per cent.*
Hounslow	9·6
Enfield	9·5
Merton	8·8
Avon	8·7
Croydon	8·7
Gloucestershire	8·6
East Sussex	8·6
Ealing	8·5
Berkshire	8·4
Redbridge	7·9
Hampshire	7·9
Surrey	7·7
Bexley	7·6
Rotherham	7·5
St. Helens	7·5
Liverpool	7·5
Warwickshire	7·4
Kingston-upon-Thames	7·3
Wirral	7·3
Sutton	7·3
Lancashire	7·2
Waltham Forest	7·2
Hillingdon	7·2
Dorset	7·1
Solihull	7·0
Harrow	7·0
Kent	7·0
North Tyneside	6·9
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	6·9
Nottinghamshire	6·9
I.L.E.A.	6·7
Coventry	6·7

Local education authority	*Net recurrent expenditure[1]: special needs as a percentage of total education spending[2] Per cent.*
Buckinghamshire	6·7
Sandwell	6·7
Birmingham	6·6
Rochdale	6·6
Barnet	6·6
Somerset	6·5
Barking	6·5
Salford	6·4
Hertfordshire	6·4
Bradford	6·4
Bury	6·3
Cleveland	6·2
Wolverhampton	6·2
West Sussex	6·2
Newham	6·2
Knowsley	6·2
Bromley	6·2
Devon	6·2
Essex	6·2
Derbyshire	6·1
Stockport	6·0
Northamptonshire	6·0
Bolton	6·0
North Yorkshire	5·9
Wigan	5·9
Lincolnshire	5·9
Wiltshire	5·9
Cheshire	5·9
Oxfordshire	5·9
Hereford and Worcester	5·7
Richmond-upon-Thames	5·7
Bedfordshire	5·6
Northumberland	5·6
Cambridgeshire	5·6
Norfolk	5·5
Tameside	5·5
Sefton	5·5
Gateshead	5·5
Shropshire	5·4
Durham	5·4
Oldham	5·4
Staffordshire	5·3
Dudley	5·3
Sheffield	5·1
Sunderland	5·1
Doncaster	5·1
South Tyneside	5·0
Kirklees	5·0
Suffolk	5·0
Isle of Wight	5·0
Brent	4·9
Havering	4·7
Trafford	4·5
Humberside	4·4
Leeds	4·4
Leicestershire	4·3
Cumbria	4·1
Walsall	4·1
Cornwall	4·0
Calderdale	3·8
Barnsley	3·6
Haringey	N/A
Manchester	N/A
Wakefield	N/A

Notes:

[1] Excluding financing costs of capital expenditure, school meals, income from specific grants and central education department administration costs.

[2] The figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DOE. N/A denotes that an expenditure return has not been received from an LEA.

TRANSPORT

Wilhelmina J

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive an interim report of the inspector's inquiry into the loss of the Wilhelmina J fishing vessel.

Mr. McLoughlin: The chief inspector of marine accidents submitted the inspector's interim report, which contained the initial findings of the inspector regarding the collision between the Zulfikar and Wilhelmina J, to the Secretary of State on 24 April. The inspector's inquiry continues.

Thames Passenger Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sums he has authorised in each of the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92 for assisting passenger services on the River Thames in London; and what were the approximate number of passenger miles travelled on assisted services, and the assistance in pence per mile respectively for the year 1990-91.

Mr. McLoughlin: The £500,000 grant made by the Government in 1989 was part of a £2·5 million public-private sector initiative to promote and improve the service provided, and to enable the undertaking to establish its commercial viability over a three-year period. We have made no further grants. The current operator, the River Bus Partnership, is not required to provide us with details of passenger carryings.

Seat Belts

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of injuries caused in each of the last five years to passengers in heavy goods vehicles or commercial vehicles who are not wearing seat belts.

Mr. Chope: Information regarding seat belt use by casualties in heavy goods vehicles or commercial vehicles is not available. Information on passenger casualties in light goods vehicles is given in the table. Data for 1990 are not yet available.

Injuries to passengers in light goods vehicles[1] who were not wearing a seat belt: Great Britain: 1985-89

	Number
1985	952
1986	980
1987	899
1988	938
1989	885

[1] Light goods vehicles are defined as goods vehicles up to 1·5 tons unladen weight.

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring in regulations making it compulsory for passengers in the front of heavy goods vehicles or commercial vehicles to wear seat belts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The present seat belt wearing regulations require seat belts to be used by front seat passengers

occupying the specified passenger seat of such vehicles as well as by the driver, where they are fitted. A number of manufacturers of heavy goods vehicles already fit seat belts voluntarily as an important safety feature. A European Community directive will require all new HGVs to be fitted with seat belts from 1997. Seat belts have been required to be fitted to the driver's seat and exposed forward facing front seat of coaches and large minibuses since 1 October 1988.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the precise reference to where in the Severn bridge concession agreement the provisions and presumptions about interest charges for the project are covered.

Mr. Chope: Clause 5 and schedule 2—part 4—of the concession agreement with Severn River Crossing plc set out the basis of the financial terms for the project. The detailed provisions relating to interest charges are commercially confidential and are contained in the supporting financial documentation to the agreement.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Severn bridge debt.

Mr. Chope: The net debt on the Severn bridge at 31 March 1990 was £114 million.

M40 (Service Areas)

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what temporary service facilities will now be introduced on the M40 following the rejection of planning permission for motorway service areas.

Mr. Chope: Planning permission has been refused for the motorway service area—MSA—proposed at Tetsworth to serve the southern section of the M40. Two other MSAs are proposed, one at Barn Hill, between junctions 12 and 13, on which a planning decision is awaited; and one at Ardley, at junction 10, for which planning clearance has been obtained. It is hoped to have the Ardley MSA developed and open early in 1993.

In the meantime, signs to the MSAs at Frankley and Hilton Park on the M6 and at Tamworth on the M42 are being modified to indicate that there are no services on the M40. Signs to similar effect are being erected on major approach roads to the M40 such as A34 and A46.

Temporary signs will be erected on the M40 within the next few weeks to indicate the availability of 24-hour fuel facilities off junctions 10 and 15 for emergency use. The general "No services" signing will remain on the motorway.

Agreement in principle has been reached with Warwickshire and Oxfordshire county councils for emergency lavatory facilities to be provided on A542 between junctions 13 and 14 and off junction 10. When these facilities are in place, they, too, will be signed from the motorway.

Road Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the results of traffic-calming measures on accident levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The urban safety project carried out by the transport and road research laboratory indicated that traffic-calming measures can reduce casualties in residential areas by an average of 13 per cent. If this approach were applied nationally, approximately 5 per cent. of all road casualties would be saved.

PRIME MINISTER

Budget Secrecy

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consider loosening pre-Budget secrecy on issues that are not market sensitive.

The Prime Minister: It is already the practice to consult interested parties where appropriate on tax measures for possible inclusion in future Budgets. In this year's Budget, my right hon. Friend announced consultation on at least nine separate issues. In addition, proposals in the Finance Bill are subject to detailed consideration in Committee in the usual way.

Steroids

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements have existed between the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food over the past four years in preparing prosecutions against people claimed to be dealing illegally in anabolic steroids.

The Prime Minister: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's investigation branch carries out investigations at the request and under the direction of the medicines control agency's—MCA—enforcement unit into persons suspected of dealing illegally in anabolic steroids. On completion of an investigation the MCA, subject to solicitor's advice, decides whether to prosecute.

China

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's position regarding the renewal by the United States Government of China's most favoured nation status.

The Prime Minister: Renewal by the United States Government of most favoured nation status for China is of great importance to Hong Kong. We hope that both the House of Representatives and the Senate will give their support to this measure.

Hong Kong's economy is now inextricably linked with that of China. More than two thirds of Chinese exports to the United States are routed through Hong Kong. It has been estimated that non-renewal of China's MFN could result in a loss of some 43,000 Hong Kong jobs, a drop of up to half in Hong Kong's current GDP growth and a loss of US$9 billion to 12 billion in trade. American commercial interest and investment in Hong Kong would also be adversely affected.

There have been some calls for renewal to be made subject to conditions, but this, too, would be bad for Hong Kong. The resulting uncertainty would be a major disincentive to investment in Hong Kong.

Watney Truman Tenants

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has sent to the representations from Watney Truman tenants about notices to quit from Watney's brewery and in particular, the notice to quit to the proprietor of the Plough public house, Coldharbour lane, London SE5.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations on this matter. The Government have expressed their concern that certain brewers are issuing notices to quit to their tenants. However, we have received assurances that the purpose of most of these notices is to allow the renegotiation of tenancy agreements. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is keeping in close contact with the brewers and representatives of the tenants on this issue.

WALES

Schools Dental Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of pupils inspected and the number of pupils re-inspected by the school service of the community dental service in 1979 and the most recent available year *(a)* by authority and *(b)* for Wales as a whole.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is given in the table.

District Health Authority	*Year ending 31 December 1979*		*Year ending 31 March 1990*	
	Pupils inspected	*Pupils re-inspected*	*Pupils inspected*	*Pupils re-inspected*
Clwyd	31,773	4,113	26,781	2,011
East Dyfed	35,043	8,640	13,814	1,681
Pembrokeshire			15,275	8,150
Gwent	54,188	4,850	30,140	6,934
Gwynedd	16,580	777	16,157	1,434
Mid Glamorgan	62,739	12,379	49,726	10,039
Powys	12,439	1,761	11,398	4,054
South Glamorgan	40,851	5,677	38,939	3,761
West Glamorgan	37,238	4,439	45,262	3,828
Wales	290,851	42,636	247,497	41,892

Pre-school Playgroups

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a tour of Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association groups in east Clwyd.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to do so.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has met Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association leaders.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I met leaders of the Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association at a recent reception at the House of Commons. Officials met leaders of Wales PPA on 1 July, when funding arrangements were discussed.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association leaders at their Wales headquarters.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have not been invited to do so.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount of cash given to the Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association in real terms for the last three years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The total amount of grant given to the Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 over the financial year 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 was £417,757. In addition, in 1989-90 and 1990-91, the Gwynedd Pre-School Playgroups Association received grants totalling £8,500 under section 26 of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976. For 1991-92 the following grants have been offered to the Wales PPA and its county associations.

	£
Under section 28(B)(2) of the National Health Service Act 1977, as amended	
Core cost	143,657
Children Act Training	5,500
Powys PPA Development Officer	4,778
Gwent PPA Training Assistant	6,480
Under section 26 of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976	
Gwynedd Pre-School Playgroup Association	7,500
Total	167,915

Royal Welch Fusiliers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the regimental headquarters of the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Mr. David Hunt: I have not been approached to visit the regimental headquarters of the Royal Welch Fusiliers and have no immediate plans to do so.

Belmont Special School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Belmont special school, Buckley.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any immediate plans to do so.

Official Visit (America)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the mode of transport used for the recent official visit to north America, its total travel cost, and the evaluation used of the alternatives of private jet hire as against scheduled services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I travelled to and from north America by scheduled air flights. Journeys within north America were undertaken by aeroplane and by car. As soon as the travel costs are known I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. Alternative modes of transport were considered for all journeys and the most practical option chosen in each case.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Treatment

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of Britain's coastline will be designated as less sensitive under the terms of the EC municipal waste water treatment directive.

Mr. Trippier: Less sensitive areas will be identified by the Government on the advice of the relevant regulatory authorities in accordance with the criteria and timetable contained in the directive.

Estate Action Programme

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the annual allocations to the area of the London borough of Hackney through the estate action programme since its inception, and the projects supported.

Mr. Yeo: Since the inception of the estate action (EA) programme the London borough of Hackney has received the following allocations of EA resources for projects in the borough:

		Projects supported
1988-89	£357,000	Clapton Park Estate (Phase I)
1989-90	£932,000	Clapton Park Estate (Phase I) Alexandra National House Fellows Court Estate
1990-91	£984,000	Clapton Park Estate (Phase II) Alexandra National House Fellows Court Estate
1991-92	£1,139,000	Clapton Park Estate (Phase II) Alexandra National House

Further resources of £2,526,000 have been earmarked for works at the Clapton park estate (phases II and III) in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Bird Imports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the common name of those bird species which require a sales exemption under EC regulation 3626/82, which implements the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species.

Mr. Baldry: I have today placed a copy of the information requested in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the number of cases investigated by his Department of birds offered for sale suspected of not having exemption under EC regulation 3626/82, the number which were subject to legal proceedings and the number which resulted in prosecutions in each of the last three years for which information is available.

Mr. Baldry: My Department's investigations are limited to identifying possible offences, making initial inquiries, and passing information to the police when appropriate. Subsequent investigations are primarily the responsibility of the police, although we keep records of any prosecutions.

The details requested are as follows:

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991*[1]
Initial inquiries by the Department	86	82	24
Legal proceedings taken by the police	5	4	1
Prosecutions	1	3	—

[1] April-July.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish an analysis of inter-regional transfers within England in 1990-91 and 1991-92 due to the operation of the uniform business rate, in a similar form to the tables placed in the Library, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, columns 9-10.

Mr. Portillo: The available information is as follows:

	Provisional contributions from Local Authorities to non-dom. rate pool 1990-91 £ million	*Receipts from non-domestic rates pool 1990-91* £ million	*Provisional contributions from Local Authorities to non-dom. rate pool 1991-92* £ million	*Receipts from non-domestic rates pool 1991-92* £ million
Northern	455	679	481	806
North West	1,004	1,373	1,072	1,622
Yorkshire and Humberside	758	1,083	810	1,277
East Midlands	592	878	651	1,044
West Midlands	825	1,126	882	1,345
East Anglia	301	445	359	533
South East	1,890	2,344	2,255	2,773
South West	633	1,024	739	1,229
London	2,669	1,477	3,121	1,780
England	9,127	10,429	10,369	12,408

Provisional contributions from local authorities to the non-domestic rates pool do not represent the total amounts of non-domestic rates paid to the pool for each region, because

(i) properties on the Central and Crown lists make payments direct to the non-domestic rates pool. It is not known how much of the total yield from these properties relates to each region.

(ii) the provisional contributions made by local authorities to the non-domestic rates pool are calculated on the basis of the rateable value of properties on the local rating list as at 31 December the previous year.

Information about the actual rates payable in respect of 1990-91 is not likely to be available till November 1991.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the average amount each domestic ratepayer was charged to cover the shortfall caused by non-collection in 1989.

Mr. Key: No information is available centrally.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of community charge remaining uncollected in Tower Hamlets in April.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) on 4 July at column *181*.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in London *(a)* the number of individuals who are liable to pay community charge and *(b)* the number who are exempt from the charge distinguished by exemption category.

Mr. Key: The available information on the number of people liable, at 31 March 1991, to make a payment in respect of a personal community charge for each local authority in London is given in the table. For information on the numbers exempt, by exemption category, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 December 1990 at col *267*.

Number of people liable to make a payment in respect of a personal community charge by 31 March 1991

	Number
London boroughs	
Barking and Dagenham	109,903
Barnet	Not av.
Bexley	179,000
Brent	Not av.
Bromley	255,000
Camden	Not av.
City of London	3,655
Croydon	260,266
Ealing	207,000
Enfield	269,366
Greenwich	160,000
Hackney	143,620
Hammersmith and Fulham	126,036
Haringey	173,600
Harrow	158,987
Havering	189,871
Hillingdon	195,197
Hounslow	183,420
Islington	141,600
Kensington and Chelsea	117,000
Kingston-upon-Thames	133,616
Lambeth	186,013
Lewisham	Not av.
Merton	149,532
Newham	161,003
Redbridge	227,417
Richmond-upon-Thames	146,888
Southwark	176,426
Tower Hamlets	126,665
Waltham Forest	185,000
Wandsworth	213,000
Westminster	158,896

Oil and Gas Exploration

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the four statutory organisations recently devolved from the Nature Conservancy Council has the lead responsibility for advising Government Departments on the nature conservation implications of offshore licensing.

Mr. Trippier: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) provides advice on nature conservation matters which concern Great Britain as a whole or have international implications. The JNCC is considering whether it should co-ordinate the provision of advice on all offshore licensing applications for gas and oil.

Government Offices (Flags)

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are taken to ensure the proper display of union flags from Government offices in Whitehall.

Mr. Yeo: My Department issues instructions to other Government Departments about the flying of the union flag on buildings of which they are the sole or principal occupants. These instructions include rules for hoisting flags and the dates and occasions on which this should be done. Individual accommodation officers are responsible for ensuring that the rules are strictly adhered to.

Empty Properties

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the figures for empty properties by tenure for each London borough annually since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of their own dwellings which were empty at 1 April, and estimates the number of empty dwellings owned by other public sector bodies, housing associations and the private sector, in their annual housing investment programme returns (HIP1). The available figures for London boroughs appear in the "HIP1 All Items Print" for each year since 1979, at the column references shown as follows:

"HIP1 All Items Print"—column references

	Local Authority	*Housing Authority*	*Other Public Sector*[1]	*Private Sector*
1979	B41	B42 + B43[2]	B44	B45
1980	A81	A82 + A83[2]	A84	A85
1981 to 1984	A71	A72	A73	A74
1985 to 1989	A81	A82	A83	A84
1990	A71	A72	A73	A74

Notes:

[1]Other public sector includes dwellings owned by other boroughs, the GLC (up to 1985), government departments and other public sector agencies.

[2]For 1979 and 1980 there were separate estimates for local authority funded housing association dwellings and others.

Copies of all the documents are in the Library.

Homelessness

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the numbers of people accepted as homeless for each London borough since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning gave to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 30 April 1991 at col *511*.

Pollution Control

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which organisations have been consulted on the draft Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution internal procedure guidance notes for implementing integrated pollution control; whether he intends to consult more widely on these guidance notes and on the guidelines and criteria which Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will use in enforcing integrated pollution control; and what is his deadline for comments.

Mr. Trippier: The following list indentifies those organisations that have been consulted on the HMIP internal procedures guidance, which will ultimately form the part of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) procedures manual. This guidance includes the guidelines and criteria which Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will use in enforcing integrated pollution control.

The consultation has been in two phases. The first phase containing the majority of the guidance material, started on 14 June with comments requested by 12 July. The second phase, consisting of a short three-page note was implemented on 2 July, with replies requested by 29 July.

There are no plans to consult more widely, although any organisation that would like to comment on the guidance documentation is at liberty to request a set through HMIP.

Proposed list of consultees

1. Department of the Environment (EPI, AQ and Legal)
2. Department of Energy
3. Department of Trade and Industry
4. Welsh Office
5. Scottish Development Department (HMIPI)
6. Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland)
7. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
8. Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution
9. National Rivers Authority
10. Health and Safety Executive
11. National Audit Office
12. Nature Conservancy Council for England
13. Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland
14. Countryside Council for Wales
15. Association of Metropolitan Authorities
16. Association of County Councils
17. Association of District Councils
18. Water Services Association
19. British Ports Federation
20. Institute of Environmental Health Officers
21. Confederation of British Industries
22. Chemical Industries Association
23. Engineering Employers Federation
24. British Non-Ferrous Metals Association
25. British Metal Castings Council
26. Metal Finishing Association
27. ENDS
28. Friends of the Earth
29. Greenpeace
30. UK Petroleum Industries Association
31. Metcom

Local Government Commission

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the appointment and composition of the membership of the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Key: Subject to Parliament, the new Local Government Commission will be set up next year. The Secretary of State will appoint its members, and will seek to ensure a balanced membership.

Local Government Boundary Commission

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the names, geographical origins, local government experience and when it was gained, other experience and length of service of each member of the local government Boundary Commission who took part in the local government Boundary Commission's review of Humberside; who were the advisers and researchers; what was the number and duration of visits by the Commission and advisers and researchers to *(a)* Lincoln, *(b)* Beverley, *(c)* Grimsby and *(d)* Hull in the course of the review; and if he will list the different conclusions in the stages of the review and the voting figures on each.

Mr. Key: The present members of the Commission are Mr. G. J. Ellerton (chairman); Mr. K. F. J. Ennals; Mr. G. R. Prentice; Mrs. H. Sarkany; Mr. C. W. Smith; and Professor K. Young.

Mr. Ellerton served in the colonial service from 1945 ending up as Secretary to the Cabinet in Kenya in 1963. After service as secretary of the Maud and Mallaby Committees on local government and staffing, he joined the Elder Dempster shipping line, becoming chairman from 1972 to 1974. He was later a director of Ocean Transport and Trading Ltd., Overseas Containers Ltd., and chairman of Globe Management Ltd. At the time of his retirement from commerce in 1986, he was a director of Globe Investment Trust.

Mr. Ennals joined the civil service in 1952. After service in the Export Credits Guarantee Department, Department of Economic Affairs, and Ministry of Housing and Local Government he was director, local government directorate, Department of the Environment. He later became director general, Organisation and Establishments (DOE), and, before retirement in 1987, deputy secretary, Finance and Local Government (DOE).

Mr. Prentice began his career in 1952 as an accountant with Hertfordshire county council. He later had assistant county treasurer posts with Cheshire, Nottinghamshire, and Hampshire county councils. From 1970 he was county treasurer, Kesteven county council and from 1974 to 1979,

Lincolnshire county council. From 1979 to his retirement in 1983, he was chief executive, Lincolnshire county council.

Mrs. Sarkany held various teaching posts in north London and the USA from 1958 to 1976, later becoming a solicitor in general practice. She is a JP and part-time chairman of a supplementary benefit tribunal.

Mr. Smith trained as a civil engineer and held various posts in local authority planning departments. In 1959 he became county planning officer, East Suffolk county council. In 1971 he became chief executive, East Suffolk county council, and from 1974 until retirement in 1990, chief executive, Suffolk county council.

Professor Young was a research officer at the London School of Economics, 1966-73; research fellow, later senior research fellow, university of Kent, and school for advanced urban studies, university of Bristol. From 1979 to 1987, senior fellow, policy studies institute, during which time (1985-86) he was research director, and adviser, to the Committee on Conduct of Local Authority Business (Widdecombe Committee) and director, Institute of Local Government Studies, university of Birmingham 1987-90. He is now Professor of politics, university of London.

We have no information on the members' birthplaces.

The conduct of the review is, by statute, a matter for the Commission.

Aggregates

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the long-term forecasts of national demand for primary aggregates reproduced as figure 3 in the document "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales Review of MPG6" will be included in the draft revised version of MPG6 when it is published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: A decision on the long-term forecasts of national demand for primary aggregates to be published in the draft revision on MPG6 will be taken when we have considered the comments received about the recent forecasts shown in figure 3 in the document "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales—Review of MPG6".

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the long-term forecasts of national demand for primary aggregates recently published by his Department in "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales Review of MPG6" will be subject to further review in the light of comments on the forecasts received by his Department.

Mr. Yeo: We welcome comments on the recently published forecasts and these will be carefully considered before any decision on whether there should be a review of the present forecasts.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the regional aggregates working parties will be preparing new regional commentaries on the basis of the revised forecasts and resulting regional apportionments based on the AM89 survey.

Mr. Yeo: A regional apportionment of the recently published forecasts based on the results of the AM89 survey has been made available to the regional aggregates working parties (RAWPS) as advice which they may wish to take into account as they prepare their regional commentaries. It is also open to the RAWPS to prepare regional commentaries using their own assessment of possible long-term future regional demand.

Minerals Act 1981 (Review)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) in undertaking the review of the Minerals Act 1981, what place has been allowed for representation for the minerals industry, local authorities and statutory and non-statutory conservation organisations;

(2) what are the terms of reference for the review now being carried out by his Department of the Minerals Act 1981;

(3) what steps he is taking to consult representatives of voluntary conservation organisations as part of the review of the Minerals Act 1981.

Mr. Yeo: The Government announced in the White Paper on the Environment "This Common Inheritance" their intention to review the operation of the provisions introduced by the Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981, and the compensation arrangements under it. That review is underway and will consider:

—the nature and extent of the problem, including old permissions, particularly interim development order permissions, and historic dereliction.

—the effectiveness of the provisions of the 1981 Act and associated regulations in dealing with these problems, including reviews of mineral working sites, order making powers, level of compensation, and restoration and aftercare conditions.

—whether there are solutions or approaches outside the current legislation, including restoration bonds and/or levies.

As I stated in reply to a question by the hon. Member on 17 June, the review is being undertaken by officials with the assistance of a small informal working group comprising three representatives of the County Planning Officers Society and three representatives of the minerals industry. The review, which is already underway, is examining the technical details of the provisions. The Government have no plans to change the membership of the working group. However, interested bodies are welcome to submit representations, and any proposed changes arising from the review will be the subject of full public consultation, including environmental and amenity groups, before decisions are taken.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Emergency Planning

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by location for London the authorities that have developed emergency control centres; and how many *(a)* emergency planning officers and *(b)* clerical support staff for emergency planning officers are employed by each borough.

Mr. John Patten: According to the most recent information provided by London authorities, the following have developed emergency centres:

Hillingdon	Islington
City of London	Westminster
Waltham Forest	Barking
Merton	Hackney
Richmond	Havering

Bromley	Newham
Bexley	Redbridge
Brent	Tower Hamlets
Hammersmith	Kingston
Harrow	Lambeth
Hounslow	Sutton
Kensington	Wandsworth
Barnet	Croydon
Camden	Greenwich
Enfield	Lewisham
Haringey	Southwark

Details of emergency planning staff employed by the London boroughs are not held centrally.

TV Purchases

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East on 27 June, *Official Report*, column *509*, whether he has any proposals to ensure that the BBC does not gain commercial advantage from the monopolistic information it received concerning television purchases since 1 April or to ensure that such information is made available to other organisations who may wish to use it for commercial purposes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I explained in my answer of 27 June the use made of television licensing records created after 31 March 1991 is a matter for the BBC, not the Secretary of State. It is always open for people to approach the Data Protection Registrar if they believe the BBC's use of computerised records contravenes the Data Protection Act, or the Director General of Fair Trading if they consider the BBC are unfairly exploiting a monopoly position.

Bingo

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his consideration of the gaming board's recommendation of the relaxation of regulations on the advertising of bingo.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have recently completed our consideration of the gaming board's advice on the scope for partial relaxation of the controls, in section 42 of the Gaming Act 1968, on the advertising of licensed bingo clubs. We have concluded that there is a case for relaxing the controls on print advertising, provided there is a prohibition on all advertising of prizes away from club premises so as to prevent undue emphasis being placed on the gambling rather than the social aspects of the clubs. We do not believe that bingo advertising on local radio should be permitted. We will be writing to the Bingo Association of Great Britain in the near future to invite their views on these proposals.

Derek Bentley

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will recommend the grant of a posthumous pardon to Derek Bentley.

Mr. John Patten: Representations made in this case are still under consideration.

United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the 1991-92 grant to UKIAS; and what is the proposed grant in 1992-93.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office grant-in-aid to UKIAS for 1991-92 set at the beginning of the year amounted to £1,467 million. The further amounts to be paid in this and subsequent years as a result of the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 2 July will be determined in the light of discussions with the organisation.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with UKIAS with a view to that organisation providing legal advice and assistance in respect of immigration and asylum cases.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of whether the proposed additional resources for UKIAS will enable that organisation to send representatives to interviews with immigration officers, to provide interpreters, to obtain medical reports and to attend police stations and posts in relation to political asylum cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the light of the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 2 July, Home Office officials are discussing with UKIAS the implications for its workload and organisation and the extra resources needed. Those discussions include the range of additional functions which the service will be asked to undertake as a result of the changes announced last week.

Police Vehicles (Blue Lights)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions exist on the use of devices that emit blue light on police vehicles that are not (i) warning beacons or (ii) special warning lamps.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

Apart from the rules on warning beacons and special warning lamps, the only restriction under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 on the use of other devices which emit blue light on police vehicles is that they must not be used so as to cause undue dazzle or discomfort to other road users.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telephone Systems

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many call line identification telephone systems have been installed in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Any equipment that is to be connected to the public telephone network first has to be approved. At present no equipment has been approved that would enable customers to have calling line identification for telephone calls over the public network.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Director of OFTEL about the introduction of the call line identification telephone system to the United Kingdom as a security measure against nuisance telephone calls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My Department is in touch with OFTEL about the possible introduction of calling line identification (CLI) in the United Kingdom. This raises a number

of issues including the need for a telephone call to be carried via a digital exchange at both ends and the requirement for new equipment to be approved before it is connected to the public telephone network. OFTEL expects to publish a consultation paper on CLI later this year.

Video Telephones

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many video-telephones have been installed in the United Kingdom; what areas of the United Kingdom has video-phone cable network installed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: All terminal equipment that is to be connected to the public switched telephone network first has to be approved. No video-telephones have been submitted for approval in the United Kingdom. Technically it is possible to have video-telephones that can operate on the standard telephone network.

Inner Cities Programme

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the annual allocations to the area of the London borough of Hackney through his Department's inner cities programme since its inception, and the projects supported.

Mr. Leigh: No projects in the London borough of Hackney have so far been supported by the Government's inner cities task forces.

On 9 May last, I announced that we would open a task force in Hackney later this year. Programme expenditure in 1991-92 will be set in consultation with the task force leader when he or she is appointed, but spend in a full financial year is usually of the order of £1 million.

Soft Drinks

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what consideration has been given to the implications on the soft drinks industry of the findings of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of carbonated soft drinks;

(2) what representations he has received on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of carbonated soft drinks;

(3) when he expects to publish the findings of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of carbonated soft drinks;

(4) what period of consultation he will give the drinks industry and other interested parties after publication of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of carbonated soft drinks.

Mr. Redwood: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on carbonated drinks is currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The report will be published as quickly as is practicable.

The contents of all MMC reports remain confidential until publication. If the MMC finds no adverse effects the Secretary of State has no power to act. If the MMC has reached any adverse findings he will decide what steps, if any, should be taken to remedy the situation. He will also consider whether or not to announce a period of consultation before reaching his conclusions.

The Secretary of State does not receive representations before an MMC report has been published. Interested parties have had the opportunity to put views directly to the MMC. The Secretary of State's decision is based on the full examination and analysis contained in the MMC report. It would be inappropriate for his view to be influenced by representations from particular interest groups, since, while the report remains confidential, he is unable to seek views of others on the same points.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed in the United Kingdom soft drinks industry.

Mr. Redwood: Latest published figures show that employment in the United Kingdom soft drinks manufacturing industry (SIC 4283) was 17,400 in September 1989.

Auditing Practices Board

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library his Department's response to the CCAB Ltd. report on the restructuring of the Auditing Practices Board.

Mr. Redwood: Copies of my Department's press notice welcoming the proposals for the new Auditing Practices Board have been placed in the Library.

Company Pension Funds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to review *(a)* the treatment of company pension funds in company accounts and *(b)* the control of the assets of such pension funds.

Mr. Redwood: The accounting treatment of company contributions to pension funds is dealt with by SSAP 24 issued in 1988 by the Accounting Standards Committee. In due course, the Accounting Standards Board will be reviewing SSAP 24 as part of its programme of reviewing all standards in existence when the board was created. The control of pension fund assets is the responsibility of the trustees, who have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of the members of the scheme in accordance with the deeds and rules. It is for them to take any action necessary to protect the fund's assets.

Company Accounts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to review the present treatment of leasing in company accounts; and what provision is currently made in respect of such treatment to allow fair comparison between company performances by investors.

Mr. Redwood: Accounting standards are intended to foster greater comparability among company accounts. Accounting for leases is dealt with in statement of standard accounting practice 21 (SSAP21) issued by the Accounting Standards Committee in 1984 and, together with all other then existing standards, adopted by the Accounting Standards Board (ASB) on its formation in August 1990. The ASB announced then that it would, in due course, review all those standards. My Department has drawn the attention of the ASB to several points which will need to be considered when SSAP 21 is reviewed.

Open-ended Investment Companies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about proposals received from the Unit Trust Association for legislation facilitating the creation of open-ended investment companies.

Mr. Redwood: I am still awaiting the Unit Trust Association's proposals.

Arms Industries

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Jones) *Official Report*, 27 June, column *524*, information on arms conversion to non-arms production is collected by *(a)* any executive agency of his Department or *(b)* in any compilation of regional statistics.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* Information on arms conversion is not systematically collected by any executive agency, or published in any official compilation of regional statistics.

"Markets for Environmental Monitoring Instrumentation"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many copies of his Department's report, "Markets for Environmental Monitoring Instrumentation" have been printed and at what cost; and to whom copies have been distributed.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The publishing rights for this report were passed to HMSO. The DTI did not therefore incur any costs in relation to the publication of the report nor take any decision as to the number of copies printed. However, a number of pre-publication copies of the report were provided to GAMBICA, the monitoring equipment manufacturers trade association, in view of the considerable assistance it provided towards the report's preparation.

The report is available, at a cost of £22, through local HMSO outlets.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account has been taken of Sri Lanka's human rights record in reaching decisions on aid.

Mrs. Chalker: We announced in October 1990 that we were delaying implementation of a £3 million pledge of programme aid pending a review of all relevant factors, including Sri Lanka's human rights performance.

This review has now been carried out, and our conclusion is that, despite some encouraging steps taken by the Sri Lanka Government earlier this year, the overall satisfactory human rights situation has not improved significantly. I have therefore decided to withdraw the offer of programme aid.

Existing project aid, including technical assistance and relief activities, will continue. However, we have made it clear that any major new aid commitments will be reviewed in the light of the human rights situation.

Tropical Forests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to propose to the forthcoming Group of Seven summit a policy for a clear commitment to cease support of multilateral and bilateral aid that causes unsustainable damage to intact tropical forests.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The Government believe that multilateral and bilateral aid should not support unsustainable activities in tropical forests. They take every opportunity to make this position clear and are prepared to do so, if necessary, at the summit.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the development of a legally binding global instrument to conserve the world's forests;

(2) what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken towards facilitating the establishment of an international instrument on forests, to be signed in Brazil at the Earth Summit in 1992.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The Government support proposals for a statement of principles on the management of the world's forests which is to be endorsed by world leaders at the UN conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil in June 1992. The Government are also grateful for the agreement of a legally binding instrument thereafter. We are engaged in discussions with a wide variety of developed and developing countries in the context of the preparations for the UNCED towards this end.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of people receiving income support who, at the time the award was made, were living in the postcode areas covering Tower Hamlets;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the number of families receiving family credit who, at the time the award was made, were living in the postcode areas covering Tower Hamlets.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information in relation to income support is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Mr. Bichard will write to the hon. Member with the information in relation to family credit, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Housing and Community Charge Benefits

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table reconciling for the years 1985-86 to 1990-91 the figures for England, Scotland and Wales for housing and community charge benefits, as given in table 3 of Cm. 1514, with those for housing benefits, as given in the *Official Report*, 28 March, column *516*.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to publish such a table because the information given in column *516* of the

Official Report for 28 March was taken from the 1989 public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 621), and is based on local authority returns which are subject to adjustment. The information given in table 3 of the departmental report (Cm. 1514), is more recent and therefore includes subsequent adjustments.

Departmental Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff were in post on the date that each agency in his Department was established as an executive agency; and how many staff are in post now.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

	On establishment	*At 1 June 1991*	*Date established*
Resettlement Agency	540	505	24 May 1989
Information Technology Services Agency	2,996	3,732	2 April 1990
Contributions Agency	7,171	7,255	10 April 1991
Benefits Agency	65,604	64,979	10 April 1991

Note: Figures are whole time equivalent permanent staff only.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list new facilities for staff including nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each agency in his Department since its establishment as an executive agency.

Miss Widdecombe: The Benefits Agency has opened three workplace nurseries in Brixton, Hinchley Wood and Newcastle Upon Tyne. The Newcastle nursery is a joint venture with the Contributions Agency and Information Technology Services Agency. The Information Technology Services Agency has introduced a holiday playscheme at Lytham St. Annes.

In regard to healthcare schemes all staff aged 35 and over employed in the Department's executive agencies are to be offered the opportunity of a comprehensive health screen, including lifestyle counselling, concentrating on the main causes of premature death in the United Kingdom, coronary heart disease, and breast and cervical cancer.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each agency in his Department since its establishment as an executive agency; and if he will publish a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern.

Miss Widdecombe: The Information Technology Services Agency has introduced two new forms of alternative working patterns: *(a)* recurring temporary appointments and *(b)* short notice appointments. These cater respectively for staff contracted to work for short periods each year, and for staff employed at short notice and usually for a short period. To date the only such appointments made relate to two executive officers employed on a recurring temporary appointments basis.

The Benefits Agency, the Contributions Agency and the Resettlement Agency have not introduced any new forms of alternative working patterns since their inception as executive agencies.

Mortgages

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount paid by central Government through social security payments to home owners in mortgage interest payments each year since 1975-76 at *(a)* real and *(b)* 1990 costings.

Miss Widdecombe: Estimates of amounts included for mortgage interest in the assessment of supplementary benefit and, from 1988, income support, are given in the table:

	Number of claimants	*Average weekly payment (£)*	*Total payment per annum (£ million)*	
			Current	*1990 prices*
1975	98,000	3·93	20	68
1976	123,000	4·22	27	80
1977	124,000	5·12	33	87
1978	105,000	4·81	26	63
1979	98,000	5·96	31	64
1980	134,000	10·18	71	128
1981	196,000	12·18	124	200
1982	235,000	13·87	170	260
1983	242,000	11·93	150	218
1984	277,000	15·18	219	304
1986	356,000	18·96	351	458
1987	334,000	19·31	335	415
1988	200,000	18·33	286	340
1989	281,000	24·18	353	387

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries.

Notes: Figures for numbers of claimants are rounded to the nearest 100,000.
Figures from 1983 onwards are not comparable with earlier figures because they were collected on a different basis.
Current prices are inflated to 1990 price level by use of the RPI index.
In 1985 no Enquiry was undertaken.
The 1990 Enquiry will be published shortly.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of paying mortgage interest payments in full for the first 16 weeks of an income support claim.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost in 1989, the latest year for which annual statistical inquiry information is available, is estimated at about £35 million.

Child Benefit

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will arrange for the Benefits Agency to consider analysing child benefit payments for lone and two-parent households by post code and publishing the statistics by local authority area.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies he received from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 5 July at columns *220-21*. The information is not available.

HEALTH

Residential Care Homes

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued by his Department on the employment of placement officers whose role it is to make decisions on the transfer of people from the national health service to independent nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1989 the Department issued health circular (89)5 together with an accompanying booklet, copies of which are available in the Library. This gave health authorities general guidance on procedures and arrangements for the discharge of patients from hospital. Employment of placement officers is a matter for local decision.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support is available to residents living in private residential care homes for the mentally ill.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: People in private residential care homes can claim income support and other social security benefits. Apart from this, local authorities can offer financial support at their discretion to residents under pensionable age by meeting any shortfall between the charge made by the care home and the individual's ability to pay, taking any benefit entitlement into account. Authorities must however meet in full the cost of providing or arranging residential care under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948 offset only by charges levied on residents under the terms of that Act.

NHS Employment

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were employed by the National Health Service in 1961; and how many are employed today.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest—provisional—figures show that 797,300 whole-time equivalent staff were employed by the hospital and community health services in England at 30 September 1990, compared with 629,500 at 30 September 1971, the earliest year for which comparable figures are available.

Occupational Health Nurses

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of occupational health nurses working in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest available—provisional—figures relate to the position at 30 September 1990. On that date there were 610 occupational health nurses employed in the hospital and community health services in England. Figures are not collected by the Department for occupational health nurses working elsewhere.

Oral Health

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to launch a campaign to improve oral health.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 9 May that up to £750,000 would be made available from the Department of Health to support oral health education projects in 1991-92. More than £1 million has already been spent in support of such projects since the publication of the White Paper "Promoting Better Health". Departmental funds will be used to support innovative local projects and to disseminate examples of good practice. Several proposals are currently under consideration and we shall be interested to receive others.

School Milk

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to reintroduce free milk for all school children.

Mr. Dorrell: We have no plans to reintroduce free milk for all school children. Local authorities already have the powers to provide milk at midday free of charge to children of families in receipt of income support. This together with the provisions available under the welfare food scheme ensures that the children in most need receive a quota of free milk each day.

NHS Trust

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he gives to the stated opposition to trust status of a hospital within a district health authority in his consideration of an application for trust status by that authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An application for trust status may be made involving a number of units; such an application is subject to the normal public consultation and, while no group has a veto, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider carefully all responses received.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is being collected by his Department on the operation of national health service trusts.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department will be collecting the necessary information to monitor the performance of trusts against their three key financial duties—to achieve a 6 per cent. rate of return on net assets, to break even taking one year with another and to keep within their external financing limit. It will also be collecting certain items of information from trusts, as from all NHS provider units on manpower, activity and waiting lists.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance relating to the publication

of business plans to those hospitals and units submitting applications to become national health service trusts in April 1992.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department is currently revising its guidance in this area. Although the financial pro formas prepared by units applying for second wave trust status will be submitted to the Department in confidence, trusts will be asked to publish business plans for 1992-93.

Health Authority Staff (Transfers)

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to health authorities relating to the transfer of staff from health authority employment to local authority employment in preparation for implementation of part III of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None, but any necessary guidance will be issued in good time to allow health authorities to implement it by the time part III, including section 49, of the National Health Service Act 1990 comes into operation in 1993.

Tower Hamlets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* privately registered homes, *(b)* voluntary registered homes and *(c)* local authority homes for the elderly there were in Tower Hamlets for each year since 1979; and how many residents there were in each of those years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information readily available for the period refers to homes catering primarily for elderly people or younger people who are physically handicapped and is given in the table. Information is not available for 1979 and 1980. Detailed information, including information on homes catering primarily for elderly people is available, from 1987, in the annual publication "Residential Accommodation for Elderly and Younger Physically Handicapped People: All residents in Local Authority, Voluntary and Private Homes (RA/2)", a copy of which is available in the Library.

The number of homes and residents aged over 65 in residential homes primarily for elderly people and younger people who are physically handicapped, by sector, Tower Hamlets:

At 31 March	*Residential Homes*			*Residents aged over 65*		
	LA	*Voluntary*	*Private*	*LA*	*Voluntary*	*Private*
1981	9	3	0	405	92	0
1982	9	3	0	405	92	0
1983	9	3	0	405	92	0
1984	9	3	0	405	92	0
1985	9	3	0	367	106	0
1986	8	3	0	366	103	0
1987	9	3	0	393	103	0
1988	8	3	0	363	103	0
1989	8	4	0	300	117	0
1990	7	4	0	271	118	0

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner budget holders are now established in Tower Hamlets health authority; and what percentage of the population they cover.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand from the chairman of the North East Thames regional health authority that there are no general practices presently participating in GP fundholding within the area of Tower Hamlets district health authority.

Mental Handicap Nursing Service

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what examination has been made of the compatibility of the planned discontinuation of the community mental handicap nursing service in Somerset with the guidelines issued by his Department in association with the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has made specific inquiries to satisfy itself that people in Somerset with learning disabilities will continue to receive the care they need, within the terms of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and departmental guidance.

Psittacosis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities in which psittacosis is a notifiable disease; if he will indicate the most common ways in which psittacosis is transmitted; and how far its transmission can be controlled.

Mr. Dorrell: Psittacosis is an acute infection with variable clinical symptoms such as fever and respiratory infection. It is usually acquired by inhaling the bacterium from desiccated droppings and secretions of infected birds in an enclosed space or directly from infected birds. Household birds are a source of infection. Turkeys, ducks and pigeons are occasionally responsible for human disease. It is, however, a very rare disease. Control methods include regulating the importation of birds and the maintenance of good standards of hygiene and rearing by owners.

Psittacosis is a notifiable disease only in the districts covered by East and South Cambridgeshire district councils.

NHS Evaluation

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those organisations outside Government Departments commissioned to carry out evaluation programmes of the national health service; and when the results of these studies are likely to be published.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial resources are being allocated to any national health service evaluation programmes *(a)* currently in operation and *(b)* planned for the future.

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS research and development strategy, now being developed, will pay particular attention to the cost-effective use of resources and the introduction of improved methods of health care.

The information currently available centrally, which relates to evaluations of cost-effectiveness of health technologies financed from the Department's existing health and personal social services research programme is as follows:

Existing work title	*Total costs* £
1. Screening for foot problems in patients with diabetes	58,798
2. Hormone replacement therapy	79,814
3. Ultra sound screening in abdominal aortic aneurism	89,063
4. Breast cancer screening	1,284,000
5. Laser technologies in medical care	91,530
6. New technologies in general practice	301,899
7. Percutaneous nucleotomy compared to lumbar microdiscectomy in lumbar disc disease	87,840
8. Programme of work at Brunel University's Health Economics Research Group	511,308
9. Support to Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit	[1]343,000 [2]365,000
PLANNED WORK	
Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS)	350,000

[1] 1990-91.
[2] 1991-92.

Part III Homes

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on local authorities' continuing responsibilities for *(a)* residents of local authority part III homes which are closed down, *(b)* former residents of part III homes which were transferred to the private or voluntary sector before 25 June and *(c)* former residents of part III homes which are transferred to the private or voluntary sector between 25 June and the date on which directions issued under section 21(1) of the National Assistance Act 1948 and paragraph 2 of schedule 8 to the National Health Service Act 1977 take effect.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local authorities have, and will continue to have a statutory duty to provide residential accommodation for people in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available. This duty is not affected by any arrangements local authorities may make to transfer or close their residential care homes.

Where residential accommodation previously provided under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948 is transferred to the private or voluntary sector the extent of the local authorities' continuing responsibility for residents in these homes currently depends upon the terms on which the transfer was made. It is our intention that the status of people who are resident in homes which are transferred after the introduction of the proposed directions will remain unchanged by the transfer, in that the full cost of the accommodation and care will continue to be the responsibility of the local authority which placed them there, subject to the relevant charging provisions.

Health Service Commissioner (Annual Report)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the annual report of the Health Service Commissioner for 1990-91.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Health Service Commissioner has, as in previous years, made a report on the performance of his functions in England, Scotland and Wales.

My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales and I presented the report to the House on 28 June.

It was published on 2 July (HC536) and copies are available from the Vote Office.

OPCS Staff (Confidentiality)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what steps have been taken to ensure that all staff in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys are covered by the additional confidentiality provisions inserted into the Census Act 1920 by the Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Registrar General for England and Wales has designated the office of director of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for the purposes of section 8 of the Census Act 1920 as amended. The post of director of OPCS is the other office that the registrar general holds. Its designation has ensured that all staff who are or have been under his control, and all those people who provided or have provided services to him, are now bound by the confidentiality provisions of the Census Act 1920 as amended if they have access to any personal census data. This applies whether they work or have worked for him as registrar general or as director of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Sleeping Rough

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people sleeping rough were counted in the 1991 census in England and Wales.

Mr. Dorrell: The Registrar General for England and Wales informs me that 2,703 people—1,275 in London and 1,428 elsewhere—were counted as sleeping rough on the night of 21 to 22 April 1991 at 444 sites which had been identified beforehand by voluntary organisations, local authorities, and churches. These sites, spread throughout the country, were visited by specially recruited enumerators, many of whom also worked for voluntary organisations. The count does not include those who spent census night in a hostel or shelter or some other form of accommodation, but who occasionally sleep rough; nor does it include any people who slept rough on census night but not on identified sites. Some of these will have been counted as part of the normal enumeration.

The corresponding figures for sites in individual local authority areas will be published around the end of July in a census monitor. Final figures for local areas, including any people sleeping rough who were enumerated away

from the identified sites, will be given in the series of county reports scheduled for publication between December 1991 and October 1992. Those reports will include information about the age and sex of people sleeping rough.

Steroids

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each of the past four years for which figures are available, the numbers of prosecutions brought by his Department against people claimed to be dealing illegally in anabolic steroids; and at which level of the courts such cases were pursued.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Prosecutions*	*Court*
1990	One (7 charges)	Magistrates
1989	Two (2 charges)	Magistrates
1989	Two (10 charges)	Crown
1988	Two (48 charges)	Crown
1987	Three (3 charges)	Crown

Fluoridation

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the water authorities which have agreed to a request from a health authority to supply floridated water.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 14 June at columns *721-22* and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 27 June at column *547*.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities in which *(a)* the whole and *(b)* part of the authority's population receives fluoridated water.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest information relates to 1988 when a survey of artificial fluoride levels in England was conducted by the British Fluoridation Society. Table 1 lists the district health authority areas where all the population received water artificially fluoridated to at least 0·9 ppm. Table 2 shows those districts where some of the population received water artificially fluoridated to that level.

Table 1.

Districts where artificially fluoridated water at 0·9 ppm was received by all population in the district in 1988.

North West Durham
Gateshead
Newcastle
Bassetlaw
Sandwell
Walsall
Solihull
North Birmingham
East Birmingham
Central Birmingham
West Birmingham
South Birmingham

Table 2.

Districts where artificially fluoridated water at 0·9 ppm was received by some of the population in the district in 1988.

East Cumbria
West Cumbria
Durham
South West Durham
Northumberland
North Tyneside
Grimsby
Scunthorpe
Huddersfield
Chester
Crewe
North Derbyshire
South Derbyshire
North Lincolnshire
South Lincolnshire
Central Nottingham
Doncaster
Dudley
Wolverhampton
Worcester
Bromsgrove and Redditch
North Warwickshire
South Warwickshire
Rugby
Coventry
Mid Staffordshire
East Staffordshire
Oxford
Wycombe
North Bedfordshire
South Bedfordshire
South West Hertfordshire

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the details of the request by the national health service management executive to regional health authorities to lend money to two of the Thames regional health authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. Details of the NHS management executive's discussions with regional NHS management are not normally published.

Hexachlorocyclomexanes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the implication for human health of hexachlorocyclomexanes; and what exposure limits there are.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has been advised by the Committee on Toxicity and the Committee on the Safety of Medicines and has taken account also of the advice of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, the joint meeting on pesticide residues—JMPR—convened by the World Health Organisation, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The only hexachlorocyclohexane currently available for use in approved products with insecticidal properties in the United Kingdom is the gamma isomer more commonly known as lindane. Little information is available, and no occupational exposure limits are set, for the other isomers. Exposure limits for pesticide residues in food are determined on the basis of the acceptable daily intake—ADI. The United Kingdom has accepted on health grounds, the ADI for lindane of 0 to 0·008 mg per kg of body weight set by the JMPR in 1989. Worker exposure levels set, by the Health and Safety Commission, are 0·5 mg per cu m of air for eight hours time weighted average —TWA—for long-term exposures and 1·5 mg per cu m of air for 10 minutes TWA for brief exposures. Low concentrations are used as an insecticide in licensed medicinal products for external use.

NHS Employees

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the percentage change in the number of administrative and clerical staff in the national health service in England between September 1979 and the latest available date.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Between 30 September 1979 and 30 September 1990 the number of administrative and clerical staff, including managerial staff, in the hospital and community health services in England increased by 26 per cent. to 129,700 whole-time equivalents. Within this overall rise, the greatest increase was among staff who work in direct support of clinicians whose numbers rose by 269 per cent. to 40,620 whole-time equivalents.

Centre for Applied Microbiological Research

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *(a)* when he expects to reach a conclusion on the future of the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research, Porton Down and *(b)* when his Department's current review of the future of the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research commenced.

Mr. Dorrell: I expect to make an announcement very shortly about the future of the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research—CAMR. The latest review of the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research commenced in April 1989 and led to several detailed studies.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Director of Works

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will set out the series of procedures by which the Director of Works of the Palace of Westminster is to be appointed.

Mr. Beith: An internal public service trawl was conducted in late January and early February. The 17 potential candidates revealed by this method were considered insufficient in both number and qualifications to form the pool from which a successful candidate for this important post should be selected. The Commission therefore decided in February that the net should be cast wider by employing management consultants both to advertise the post and to identify further candidates by search. As a result of these latter exercises, a total of about 85 serious candidates was identified.

A group consisting of senior officers of both Houses, the Department of the Environment and the Civil Service Commission sifted all applications, with the assistance of the management consultants, in mid-April, and in early May the final shortlist was interviewed by a board including the Serjeant at Arms and Black Rod, a former Director General of Property Holdings and a senior vice-president of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The board was chaired by a former chief valuer of the board of Inland Revenue.

The Commission agreed in March that the post of Director of Works should, like a number of other senior appointments in the House of Commons service, be made by Mr. Speaker, but in view of the intention that the director will serve both Houses it was also agreed that Mr. Speaker should consult the Lord Chairman of Committees before making his decision. In the light of the advice of the interview board, and after duly consulting the Lord Chairman, the appointment by Mr. Speaker of Mr. Henry Webber as the first Director of Works was announced on 27 June.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Parliamentary Building

Sir David Steel: To ask the Lord President of the Council what criteria are being used in the allocation of rooms to Members and staff in the new Parliament street building; and when he expects the allocation to be made.

Mr. MacGregor: The New Building Sub-Committee resolved at its meeting on 21 May 1991 that the allocation of offices in phase 1 as between Members of political parties should be on the following basis:

Second Floor:	offices for Labour (or other Opposition party) Members
Third Floor:	offices for Conservative Members
Fourth Floor:	offices to be divided between Labour (or other Opposition party) and Conservative Members
Fifth Floor:	offices for Conservative Members
Sixth Floor:	offices for Labour (or other Opposition party) Members.

Individual offices will be allocated to Members by the accommodation Whips of the Government and official Opposition parties on behalf of the Services Committee in the usual way.

European Study

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Lord President of the Council if there are any proposals to offer hon. Members who serve on European Standing Committees the opportunity to study the operations of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers; what plans there are to arrange any study visits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: There are no such proposals for Members in their capacity as members of the European Standing Committees.

Recycling and Energy Saving

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will give consideration to implementing a policy of *(a)* recycling aluminium cans and *(b)* using ozone-friendly sprays where possible; and if he will make a statement on his general policies regarding recycling and energy saving measures within the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The authorities of both Houses have been in consultation about arrangements for the collection of used aluminium cans. Although this does pose practical problems, the matter is to be considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

The Departments responsible for cleaning the House and the parliamentary estate and the contracted cleaners are required to use cleaning materials which are environmentally acceptable. It is understood that this requirement governs the products themselves and, where appropriate, their propellants.

Both Houses co-operate to promote practicable recycling measures. At present, this includes the collection of waste paper and bottles, which are recycled in accordance with the terms of a parliamentary works office contract; and the supply of a wide range of stationery products made from recycled paper.

Energy conservation work is treated both as a specific task and as an integral part of both the maintenance of the fabric of the buildings and services on the parliamentary estate and the design of new facilities. During the year the coverage of the building energy management system will be extended, further energy efficient lighting will be installed, another major step in the modernisation of the heating system will be completed and other minor work will be carried out as the opportunity arises.

Staff of the parliamentary works office have a continuing brief to draw the attention of energy liaison officers where lighting is left on repeatedly, and security staff are asked to switch off lighting in empty rooms. It is, of course, incumbent upon all occupants of the parliamentary buildings to adopt a commonsense approach to the use of lighting and other energy-consuming equipment.

Lords Amendments

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to conduct the trial to cover the proposals in the second report of the Procedure Select Committee for Session 1990-91 to deal with the documents required for Commons consideration of amendments from the Lords to Bills when they are considered by the House.

Mr. MacGregor *[pursuant to his reply, 5 June 1991, c. 234]:* I propose to extend the operational trial to include all Bills returning from the Lords until the House rises for the Summer adjournment.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dioxins

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *132*, to what guideline figure on the levels of dioxins in milk and other foodstuffs, in nanogrammes per kg, his Ministry was working prior to setting the level at 0·7 nanogrammes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: In 1989, in the absence of any international evaluation, the Committee of Toxicity established a guideline level of 0·002 nanogrammes per kg bodyweight per day to assess intakes of dioxins from milk and other foodstuffs. This guideline was not a safety limit and has been superseded by the tolerable daily intake or 0·01 nanogrammes per kg bodyweight per day recommend by the World Health Organisation in 1990 from which the action level of 0·07 nanogrammes per kg of milk was calculated.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will supply the information as to the 27 locations in the Bolsover and North Derbyshire area where monitoring took place in respect of dioxin levels in milk.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 1 July at column *73*.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of farmers affected by dioxin levels in milk to discuss arrangements for payment to the farmers affected.

Mr. Maclean: On the question of compensation, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 2 July at column *133*.

Blue Ear Pig Disease

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether restrictions have now been imposed as a result of blue ear disease in each of the counties listed in his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 24 June, *Official Report*, column *383*.

Mr. Gummer: Restrictions as a result of suspected or confirmed disease have been imposed in, among the counties listed, County Durham, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, north Yorkshire, and west Yorkshire. Elsewhere, since 13 June restrictions have been imposed on premises which had received pigs from infected or suspect holdings in the previous 56 days.

Cetaceans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from Greenpeace and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society on the dangers to small cetaceans.

Mr. Curry: I met representatives of these organisations together with other members of Wildlife Link on 4 July and discussed our mutual concern about the dangers to small cetaceans from high seas drift nets.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what investigations have been carried out in each of the past 10 years of the numbers of cetaceans that have been caught by drift nets in the waters of *(a)* Britain and *(b)* other EEC countries.

Mr. Curry: Reliable historical information on the number of incidental by-catches by EC vessels is not available. However, following a United Kingdom initiative the North sea states have agreed a co-operative framework for the conservation of small cetaceans, including a commitment to develop schemes to monitor incidental catches more closely. In addition, the United Kingdom is supporting an EC proposal to ban drift nets above 2·5 km in length, to guard against their possible indiscriminate operation.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits have been made to farmers by ADAS staff to give free advice to farmers on pollution avoidance for each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Statistics on the number of visits to farms to give free advice on farm-related pollution matters are being collected with effect from 1 April 1991. Information in this form is not available for previous years.

Irradiated Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether food containing irradiated spices is required to be labelled as containing irradiated ingredients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Under The Food Labelling (Amendment) (Irradiated Food) Regulations 1990, which came into force on 1 January 1991, all irradiated prepacked foods and listed food ingredients, including herbs and spices, are required to carry an indication on the label that they have been irradiated, using the words "irradiated" or "treated with ionising radiation". Similar provisions apply to non-prepacked foods. In the case of foods sold in catering establishments, for practical reasons, a general statement is permitted for herbs and spices to the effect that food sold in the establishment contains, or may contain, irradiated seasonings.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 8 July.

Mr. Curry: I attended the Council of Fisheries Ministers in Brussels on 8 July 1991 together with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office.

In the Council's key discussion on improved technical conservation measures I made clear the importance of urgent action; particularly in the North sea and west of Scotland to safeguard cod and haddock stocks. I drew attention to the measures the United Kingdom introduced unilaterally on 1 July to require the use of 90 mm square mesh panels and the substantial benefit it will have particularly in reducing discards of young haddock. I am pleased that it is now wholly accepted that EC measures are needed. For the North sea and west of Scotland it is clear that the only possible basis for an agreement on mesh sizes is a minimum diamond mesh of 100 mm with a 90 mm square mesh panel option. In addition, there is widespread support for an increase to 80 mm in the Irish sea, a change which our industry has been seeking for some time, and for a number of other improvements mainly designed to reduce wasteful catches of fish not yet ready for the market plus some simplifications of existing EC rules.

I called for urgent agreement on measures to control the use of extensive drift nets and supported the length limit of 2·5 km proposed by the Commission. While recognising that EC fleets do not engage in the sort of large scale indiscriminate drift netting which prompted the 1989 United Nations resolution, I stressed the importance of the EC showing its support for the international effort to curb such fishing.

I am pleased that there was a clear commitment from the Council and the Commission to make every effort to enable final decisions on drift nets and technical conservation measures to be taken at a special Council which is to be held in late October or early November.

DEFENCE

Army Recruits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of Army recruits comes from *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* elsewhere.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1990-91, the proportion of regular Army recruits from each country was:

(a) Wales 7·0 per cent.;
(b) England 79·0 per cent.;
(c) Scotland 11·0 per cent.;
(d) Northern Ireland 2·0 per cent.; and
(e) Elsewhere 1·0 per cent.

The Gulf

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest assessment of the effects on British service men of chemical and biological reagents released in Iraq during the recent hostilities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The tactics used in attacking Iraqi chemical and biological facilities during the Gulf conflict were designed to minimise the risk of contamination outside the sites. We are not aware of any releases of chemical or biological reagents in Iraq outside such facilities.

SCOTLAND

Mental Illness Grant

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the level of mental illness specific grant taken up by each local authority in the current year;

(2) what level of funding has been allocated to the mental illness specific grant in Scotland for the current year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 5 July at columns *235-36*.

Community Care

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he plans to monitor the use local authorities make of funds allocated for community care to ensure that the money is not used to fund other local authority services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department will shortly be consulting local authorities and other interested parties, including health boards and relevant voluntary organisations, on a draft circular detailing the proposed arrangements for monitoring community care.

Bird Killing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to permit the killing of *(a)* barnacle and *(b)* Greenland white-fronted geese on Islay in order to prevent serious agricultural damage for winter 1990-91 and the total number of geese of each species killed under licence on Islay.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

	Barnacles	*White-fronts*
Number of licences issued	24	13
Number reported shot	1,365	62

Land Register

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to introduce a land register which reveals beneficial as well as nominal ownership of estates.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the ownership of land in Scotland is already available to the public by inspection of the General Register of Sasines or the Land Register of Scotland as appropriate, both of which are maintained by the Registers of Scotland Executive Agency. The Government have no plans to introduce a further register of land ownership in Scotland.

Careers Servics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on the careers service by Scottish local authorities in each year since 1979, expressed both in actual sums spent and at 1990 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is the following:

Year	*Actual Expenditure*	*Expenditure at 1990 prices £'000*
1979-80	3,827	8,274
1980-81	4,719	8,622
1981-82	5,315	8,855
1982-83	5,602	8,717
1983-84	6,377	9,483
1984-85	6,939	9,819
1985-86	7,420	9,958
1986-87	7,758	10,062
1987-88	8,945	11,020
1988-89	9,696	11,112
1989-90	10,878	11,716
1990-91	13,873	13,873

Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Nature Conservancy Council or Scottish Natural Heritage has budgeted money to fund the new natural heritage body.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Resources for Scottish Natural Heritage will be considered in this year's public expenditure round.

Caledon Forest

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what impact he estimates his policy for the future of Scotland's native Caledon forest will have on forest cover in 50 years' time;

(2) whether he will identify those areas of the Caledon forest which he hopes *(a)* to survive and *(b)* to expand in the next 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's policy for native pinewoods is to prevent any reduction in their area and to encourage their sensitive management and expansion through the Forestry Commission's woodland grant scheme. In addition, particularly important areas for nature conservation are designated as sites of special scientific interest. As a result of these policies, the area of native pinewoods in Scotland is expected to increase significantly over the next 10 and 50 years, although it is not possible to predict the future of any individual area.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the present levels of compensation to owners of the Caledon forest to ensure its survival, and its expansion.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: To encourage the maintenance, good management and expansion of native pinewoods the Forestry Commission offers the following establishment and management grants under its woodland grant scheme:

Establishment Grants (for planting, restocking and natural regeneration)		*Management Grants*		
			Standard	*Special*
Area (hectares)	*£ per hectare*	*Area (hectares)*	*£ per hectare*	*£ per hectare*
Less than 1	1,575	Less than 10	35	45
1—2·9	1,375			
3—9·9	1,175			
10 and over	975	10 and over	25	35

SSSIs

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he received from voluntary conservation movements concerning the new clause to the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill relating to the advisory committee on sites of special scientific interest.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has received letters from the following voluntary conservation organisations on the subject of the advisory committee on SSSIs: The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth (Scotland), and the Ramblers' Association. In addition, I had a meeting at their request with representatives of the RSPB on 12 June. My officials also met representatives of all the organisations listed on 18 June to discuss the new provision.

Regional Development Assistance

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to whom in Scotland, outside Government, details of companies in receipt of regional development assistance have been passed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Details of all companies receiving regional development grant or regional selective assistance where the total grant offered exceeds certain amounts are published quarterly in *The Department of Employment*

Gazette. Details of grants offered are subject to the normal constraints of commercial confidentiality and, apart from the published details, information on individual cases is not disclosed to third parties without companies' consent.

Fife Scottish Bus Company

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any of the bidders for the Fife Scottish Bus company are in receipt of Government grants or investment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None of the bidders for Fife Scottish Omnibuses Limited has received any direct Government funding for which my right hon. Friend is responsible. In January 1989 the Scottish Development Agency however made an investment on commercial terms of £500,000 in preference shares in Stagecoach (Holdings) Limited, alongside a number of other investors. These shares are now held by Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether any director of Scottish Enterpise has received remuneration from either of the current bidders for the Fife Scottish Bus company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The managing director of Stagecoach (Holdings) Ltd. one of the bidders for Fife Scottish, was a board member of Scottish Enterprise from 5 March 1990 until her resignation through pressure of business on 29 October 1990. The affairs of Fife Scottish Bus company, or of the current bidders, have not been discussed by the Scottish Enterprise board. Consequently there has been no occasion for board members to declare any personal interest in the bidders, and the private financial affairs of board members are not a matter for my right hon. Friend. So far as I am aware, however, no other Scottish Enterprise board member nor any senior employee has, since appointment, received remuneration from any bidder.

Government Assistance to Companies

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to whom in Scotland, outside Government, any details of individuals, companies or providers in receipt of either employment training, youth training, business growth training or enterprise allowance scheme have been passed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am not in a position to say, for every case in Scotland, to whom outside Government details have been passed of individuals, companies or providers involved with employment training, youth training, business growth training or the enterprise allowance scheme.

In normal circumstances details relating to current trainees will be held by training managers and training agents and will be made available to local enterprise officials and officials of Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise as necessary for operational purposes. Details of individual trainees may also be given to placement providers and to the careers service where it is appropriate to do so for the purposes of securing suitable training.

Details of companies and training providers will normally be held by local enterprise companies and in some cases their agents but Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise officials may have access to that information for operational purposes.

Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and local enterprise companies will not normally divulge any information they hold to a third party unless they are satisfied that the trainee, company or provider has acquiesced to the provision of that information or where the person or body seeking the information has authority to demand it—for example, the police.

AIDS

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on HIV/AIDS treatment care and prevention by each of the Scottish health boards in 1990-91 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* This information is not yet available centrally, but will be included in reports being prepared by health boards under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987.

Housing

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the number of properties to be inspected in each local authority area for the national house condition survey is to be determined.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The number of dwellings which will be surveyed in each local authority area will depend on the outcome of a random sample selection. At least 15,000 dwellings in Scotland will be surveyed, and to achieve this a large number will initially be selected.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will allocate resources to Sutherland district council and Caithness district council to enable those authorities to undertake a housing conditions survey which complies with the Scottish Office model.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* Sutherland and Caithness district councils should include any plans for carrying out local house condition surveys in their housing capital programmes which are due to be submitted to the Scottish Office environment department in November. Any such plans will be taken into account in determining the level of housing capital allocations for these authorities in 1992-93.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what manner the findings of the Scottish Office building inspectorate study of weather conditions and their effect on houses are reflected in the capital allocations made to Sutherland district council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* It is for local authorities to take account of all relevant factors when assessing their housing needs and reflecting these in the housing capital programmes which the Scottish Office environment department asks to be submitted in November each year. Housing capital programmes are taken into account when decisions are made on capital allocations.

Careers Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many responses were received to the recently published consultation document "The Future of the Careers Service"; and if he will place copies of these responses in the Library;

(2) how many responses which he received on the consultation paper "The Future of the Careers Service" favoured *(a)* local enterprise companies acquiring full responsibility for providing the service, *(b)* education/business partnerships becoming responsible, *(c)* the service being contracted out through competitive tender and *(d)* the service continuing to be run by the education authorities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Sixty-one responses were received up to 5 July. Of these seven supported the provision of the careers service through local enterprise companies; 23 favoured some form of partnership; two saw merit in contracting out and 29 suggested a continuation of the current arrangements. Some further responses are expected.

Copies of all responses received are being placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Environmental Training Initiatives

12. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to support future environmental training initiatives in the Sheffield area following the withdrawal of training and enterprise council funding of environmental training projects.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend announced extra resources for training on 19 June. It is for Sheffield TEC to decide, within its contract with my Department, what training, including environmental training, to support in the Sheffield area.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

13. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people have founded their own business since 1983 under the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Forth: Between August 1983 and May 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, the enterprise allowance scheme has helped 571,953 people to start their own business.

National Vocational Qualifications

14. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about his proposals to extend national vocational qualifications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The proposals relating to national vocational qualifications in the Government's White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" have been widely welcomed. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications is on target to produce by the end of 1992 NVQs covering 80 per cent. of the work force up to level 4 of its framework. The council has also been asked to lead on developing more general national vocational qualifications.

Low Pay

15. **Mrs Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of employed persons paid less than £3·40 per hour.

Mr. Howard: We estimate that the number paid less than this is around 4 million, of whom 1 million are teenagers.

Unemployment

16. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the percentage change in the level of unemployment in the last 12 months in (i) Leyton and (ii) London.

Mr. Jackson: In the parliamentary constituency of Leyton and in the Greater London region, unemployment, not seasonally adjusted, increased by 60 per cent. in the 12 months to May 1991.

Small Firms Service

17. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the work of the small firms service.

Mr. Forth: The small firms service has an excellent reputation in providing high quality information, advice and business counselling to new and existing small businesses. It dealt with over 317,000 inquiries and gave more than 50,000 counselling sessions in its last full year of operation. The service is now being transferred to the emerging network of training and enterprise councils who have plans to make further significant improvements to make it even more effective in meeting local needs.

Nuclear Inspectors

18. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increase the complement of qualified nuclear inspectors.

Mr. Forth: On 1 June 1991, there were 163 nuclear inspectors in post in the Health and Safety Executive. HSE plans to increase this to 176 by 1 April 1992.

Training, Stockport and Tameside

19. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on training in Stockport and Tameside.

Mr. Jackson: A wide range of services and programmes are provided by the two local training and enterprise councils which benefit businesses and individuals in Stockport and Tameside.

European Social Charter

20. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met the EC Social Affairs Commissioner to discuss the social charter.

Mr. Howard: I met Mrs. Papandreou at the Social Affairs Council on 25 June.

Minimum Wage

21. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union regarding proposals for a national statutory minimum wage.

Mr. Howard: I have not received any representations from the EETPU, but the union's general secretary has made it clear that his members would strongly oppose any wage restraint for higher paid workers linked to Labour's proposals for the introduction of a national legal minimum wage. If differentials were fully restored up to 2 million jobs could be lost.

28. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received seeking the introduction of a statutory minimum wage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Most of the representations I receive are strongly opposed to any statutory wage fixing. The Labour party's proposal for a national legal minimum wage has been condemned by employers, academics and trades unions.

Training and Enterprise Councils

23. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he will take to help the TECs provide a higher level of training for the south-west.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils have been given the resources to undertake training which is relevant to the needs of their local areas.

Labour Statistics

24. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of people in work in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Howard: The work force in employment in the United Kingdom stood at 25,365,000 in June 1979 and at 26,666,000 in December 1990—an increase of 1·3 million over the period.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were registered unemployed in Tower Hamlets in each year since 1970, by electoral ward.

Mr. Jackson: Information, relating to claimants at unemployment benefit offices, is available from June 1983 and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Trade Unions (Complaints)

25. **Mr. David E[illegible]s:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complaints the trade union certification officer has received from trade union members in each of the last two years.

Mr. Forth: The certification officer is an independent authority appointed under statute. I understand that he received five formal complaints under specific statutory provisions from trade union members during 1989, and 12 such complaints during 1990. Details are given in the certification officer's annual reports to the Secretary of State, copies of which are available in the Library.

Rugby and Daventry Travel to Work Area

27. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many are now employed in the Rugby/Daventry travel to work area; and what the number was when the Rugby/Daventry travel to work area was first established.

Mr. Jackson: The most recent estimates of employment in travel-to-work areas are taken from the September 1989 census of employment. There were then an estimated 49,400 employees in employment in the Rugby and Daventry travel-to-work area. This compares with a figure of 44,100 in September 1981, the earliest date for which figures are available.

EC Social Affairs Directives

26. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many social affairs directives of the EC have been implemented by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* Italy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: A European Commission report in November 1990 showed that the United Kingdom had implemented all 18 measures agreed in the social area, France and Germany had implemented 17, and Italy 11. These figures support our view that the Community needs to pay as much attention to implementation and enforcement of agreed measures as it does to new proposals.

Salary Increases

22. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of high salary increases on employment.

Mr. Howard: There is no doubt that high pay increases cost jobs. It is estimated that a 1 per cent. increase in the average real wage lowers employment by about 110,000 to 220,000.

Disabled People

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what appeal mechanism exists for disabled persons who are refused employment because of their disability.

Mr. Jackson: Where people feel that they have been refused employment because of their disability they can take up the matter with the disablement advisory service or a disablement resettlement officer who, where appropriate, can contact the employer and seek to overcome any prejudice or misunderstanding including providing guidance on the wide range of help available for integrating people with disabilities into the work force.

Training Schemes, Avon

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the amounts of allocations agreed from the European social fund for employment and training schemes in the Avon training area for the years commencing 1 April 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Forth: Allocations for the European social fund are determined on a calendar year basis. The amounts per calendar year for individual schemes supported outside the Government sector in Avon are as follows:

Year	Amount £
1989	478,387
1990	490,697
1991	648,782

Allocations for 1991 have not yet been finalised and are therefore provisional. In addition to these specific allocations, the Avon area benefits from the European social fund through support for national programmes such as employment training and youth training.

Government Measures

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment is made of the impact on employment of new Government measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The new measures that my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 19 June will promote employment by helping unemployed people back to work, preparing them for the jobs that are available and keeping them in touch with the labour market. They will raise the total number of opportunities which the Government are making available to unemployed people from 650,000 to 840,000 this year and to 900,000 next year—more than ever before.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 July 1991

TRANSPORT

Transport Security

Mr. Ames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the 1990-91 annual report of the Chief Inspector of Transport Security.

Mr. Rifkind: I am today placing copies of this report in the Library of the House.

Shipping Accidents

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what systematic assessment is made of human error in casualty investigations for shipping accidents.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 9 July 1991]:* Inspectors carrying out investigations into marine accidents are fully alive to the human factor in all its forms. Their inquiries, therefore, as a matter of course, include examination into the possibility of error and, where it is found, an assessment both of its cause and its effect.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 2 July, how many accidents listed have been attributed to human error for each year 1981 to 1990 involving United Kingdom registered vessels, and 1989 to 1990 involving United Kingdom ferries.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 9 July 1991]:* The majority of accidents have several contributory factors and cannot be attributed to one specific individual cause. A list such as that asked for therefore cannot be provided. However, human error is considered to be at least one factor in some 80 per cent. of accidents; this applies to vessels of all types including ferries.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to lay before Parliament and to publish the annual report of the Serious Fraud Office for the year 1990-91.

The Attorney-General: The report has today been laid before Parliament. I have caused a copy of the report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Treaties

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those treaties that have been signed by Her Majesty's Government but have not yet been ratified, giving for each treaty the date of signing.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the process by which treaties are ratified by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Before ratifying a treaty Her Majesty's Government must ensure that they have the necessary statutory powers to enable them to give effect to its provisions and, if not, that the necessary enabling legislation is made. The text of the treaty is then laid before Parliament for a minimum of 21 parliamentary sitting days before it is ratified in order to give Parliament the opportunity to debate its provisions.

CFE Treaty

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Her Majesty's Government to ratify the conventional forces in Europe treaty.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We expect to do so this autumn.

Antarctica

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether his Department has evaluated what effect withdrawing a regular Royal Navy presence in Antarctica could have on the United Kingdom's current and future association with that area;

(2) what assessment has been made of the impact of the withdrawal of HMS Endurance on the study and understanding of the Antarctic continent and protection of United Kingdom interests in that region.

Mr. Garel-Jones: HMS Endurance carries out hydrographic surveys and provides support for the British Antarctic Survey's science programme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is aware of the role of HMS Endurance in supporting Her Majesty's Government's commitment to British interests in the area.

Romania

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were last made to the Romanian authorities about anti-semitism.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We take every suitable opportunity to press the Romanian Government to ensure that the rights of all members of the Jewish and other minority communities in Romania are fully respected. We have asked Her Majesty's ambassador in Bucharest to monitor closely certain recent expressions of anti-semitism in Romania.

Mr. Peter Nadin

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to his correspondence with the hon. Member for Islington, North, if he will ask the British embassy in Athens to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of the hon. Member's constituent Peter Nadin while in police

custody; and if he will meet the hon. Member for Islington, North to receive representations on behalf of the deceased's mother.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British consular officers have no investigatory rôle. Mr. Nadin's death was investigated by the Greek authorities in 1984. They concluded that he committed suicide. The Greek authorities reviewed the case in 1985 at our request. They reached the same conclusion. In the absence of new evidence we have no grounds to ask them to reopen the case.

In the circumstances, there is little to be gained from a meeting about this sad case.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

INWARD

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what proportion of moneys allocated to INWARD for industrial promotion in the north-west of England is allocated for the promotion of Cumbria;

(2) if he will state on what county justification basis moneys are allocated to INWARD for the industrial promotion of the north-west of England.

Mr. Leigh: For the current financial year, 1991-92, INWARD received from the Department of Trade and Industry grant-in-aid of £900,000. This grant is allocated to INWARD on the basis of an agreed business plan for the promotion of overseas inward investment into the north-west. However, within the broad thrust of promotion of the region it is for INWARD to decide the most appropriate allocations of emphasis, including that to individual counties such as Cumbria, to meet its business objectives.

The principal objective is to provide information on all parts of the region in response to investors inquiries. Many of these are relayed to INWARD from the Invest In Britain Bureau as a result of the latter's promotional activities on behalf of the UK. Another objective is to service such investors, on behalf of IBB, when visiting the region. These activities are funded 100 per cent. The DTI through IBB, also funds 50 per cent. of INWARD's own promotional activity overseas, and it is free to attract additional funding from local sources to supplement this activity or for other regional activities in which the Department has no direct involvement.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will monitor the use of moneys paid to INWARD for industrial promotion in the north-west to ensure that each county that is a member of INWARD receives its fair share of industrial inquiries.

Mr. Leigh: The Department of Trade and Industry closely monitors the activities of all the regional development organisations, including INWARD, to ensure that the grant is spent to the best effect. An important function of an RDO is to provide a "one-stop shop" where all the potential sites in the region can be accessed by an investor. In responding to inquiries from industry the prime concern of RDOs must be to supply what industry needs, which will include fulfilling locational requirements as closely as possible. Although I have no doubts that all RDOs make every effort to ensure that all local authority members have a chance to respond to suitable inquiries, relations with members are principally a matter for the respective RDO board.

Sound Diffusion Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department has taken following his inspectors' reports on Sound Diffusion Ltd.

Mr. Redwood: Following the receipt of the inspectors' report, consideration is being given to the possibility of application to the court under section 8 of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986. A copy of the report has also been provided to the Institute of Chartered Accountants for it to consider the conduct of its members.

Investment Brokers Act 1977

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to review the scope and contents of the Investment Brokers Act 1977.

Mr. Redwood: I assume that the hon. Member is asking about the Insurance Brokers Registration Act 1977. I have no plans to review it.

Ernst and Young

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions since 1988 his Department's inspectors have criticised the performance of Ernst and Young and its predecessors.

Mr. Redwood: Three reports of Companies Act inspectors published since 1 January 1989 contain criticisms of the firms which now form Ernst and Young:

Name of company	*Date of publication of report*	*Name of firm criticised*
Alexander Howden Holdings plc	29 August 1990	Arthur Young
Minet Holdings plc/ WMD Underwriting Agencies Limited	29 August 1990	Arthur Young
Sound Diffusion plc	1 May 1991	Arthur Young Ernst and Whinney

Insurance Selling

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations exist to ensure capital adequacy, creditworthiness and sound financial reporting by sellers of insurance not covered by the Investment Brokers Act 1977.

Mr. Redwood: As regards insurance intermediaries not registered under the Insurance Brokers Registration Act, those selling insurance which comprises an investment product are regulated under the Financial Services Act regime, and those selling general insurance come under the Association of British Insurers' code of practice for non-registered general insurance intermediaries.

Space Consultative Committee

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the consultative committee with companies active in space last met; and when it will next meet.

Mr. Leigh: The space consultative committee was wound up in 1987 following the formation of the British national space centre and the introduction of new consultative arrangements with the space industry. The British national space centre regularly consults companies active in space through its advisory committees and other consultative procedures.

Medicines

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *19*, how many generic manufacturers made representations; and how many of these actually manufacture in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 9 July 1991]:* The represenations received from the manufacturers of generic medicines have come through their representative bodies, the European generics forum and the standard formulary medicines register of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. I do not have details of the source of the products of the companies they represent, either as active ingredients or in the finished version.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of *(a)* central Government expenditure, *(b)* local government expenditure and *(c)* national health service expenditure for each of the years 1961, 1970, 1980, 1990 and at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will show each figure as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Mellor: The information required is as follows:

	Central Government (a)		*Local Authorities (b)*		*Health (c)*	
Year	*£ million*	*Percentage of GDP*	*£ million*	*Percentage of GDP*	*£ million*	*Percentage of GDP*
1960	6,678	26·3	2,266	8·9	861	3·4
1970	14,396	28·3	6,522	12·8	1,979	3·9
1980	75,877	33·3	28,323	12·4	11,633	5·1
1990	156,286	28·9	56,416	10·4	[1]n.a.	[2]n.a.

[1] 1989 = £25,332 million.
[2] 1989 = 5·1 per cent. of GDP.

Central Government expenditure includes health expenditure given under *(c)*. Money GDP figures, used as the denominator for the calculation of the percentages, have been adjusted for the distortion arising from abolition of domestic rates.

Advisory Committee on Advertising

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the membership and, where appropriate, the employment, of the Advisory Committee on Advertising in 1980 and the changes since then.

Mr. Maples: Members of ACA in 1980 were:

Mr. G. C. Draper	Director, Commercial Operations, British Airways
Mr. K. Jacobs	Marketing Manager, Birds Eye Ltd
Mr. W. B. Morrell	Ex Vice-Chairman, Westminster Press Ltd
Mr. B. Nicholson[1]	Head of Public Affairs, Lloyd's of London
Mr. H. Thomas	Chairman, Thames Television International Ltd
Mr. B. H. Silverman	Marketing Manager, Food Division Co-operative Wholesale Society
Mr. J. S. McClean	Managing Director, Women's Magazines Group IPC Magazines Ltd

Members who have served since 1980 are:

Mr. R. Halstead (1981)	Chairman, Beecham Products
Mr. B. Downing (1983)	Deputy Chief Executive IPC Magazines Ltd
Mr. P. Gittoes (1983)	Head of Advertising Services, Barclays Bank plc
Mr. D. Hughes (1984)	Head of Public Relations, Thorn EMI plc
Mr. M. Samuel (1984)[1]	Environment Affairs Manager, J. Sainsbury plc
Mr. J. Mellon (1984)[1]	Chief Executive, IPC Magazines Ltd
Mrs. A. Ferguson (1986)[1]	Head of Group Communications, ICI plc
Mr. C. Auld (1987)[1]	Group Managing Director, Intercraft Designs Ltd
Mr. H. Turner (1987)	Managing Director, Television South West
Mr. E. Walsh (1990)	Marketing Director, Birds Eye Wall's Ltd
Mr. N. Phillips (1990)[1]	Director General, Institute of the Practitioners of Advertising
Mr. R. Spelman (1990)[1]	General Manager, Marketing, Halifax Building Society
Mr. E. Nicoli (1991)[1]	Chief Executive—European Operations, United Biscuits (Holdings) plc

[1] Current Committee members

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, for each agency nominated for the first time since 1985 by the Advisory Committee on Advertising, whether it applied or whether it was appointed to be considered.

Mr. Maples: No records are kept of when advertising agencies, nominated by the Advisory Committee on Advertising to take part in competitions for Government work, were nominated for the first time.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the agencies nominated in each year from 1985 by the Advisory Committee on Advertising.

Mr. Maples: The advertising agencies nominated by the Advisory Committee on Advertising to compete for Government campaigns from 1985 are listed in the table.

1985

Abbott Mead Vickers/SMS
Bartle Bogle Hegarty
Boase Massimi Pollitt
Butler Dennis and Garland Kenyon and Eckhardt
CDP Waterhouse
Collett Dickenson Pearce and Partners
Davidson Pearce
FCO Ltd.
Gold Greenles Trott
Leo Burnett

Lowe Howard-Spink
Saatchi and Saatchi
TBWA
J. Walter Thompson
Waldron Allen Henry and Thompson
White Bull Holmes
Wight Collins Rutherford Scott
Yellowhammer

1986
Abbott Mead Vickers/SMS
Boase Massimi Pollitt
BSB Dorland
Collett Dickenson Pearce and Partners
First City
Harrison Salinson
J. Walter Thompson
Lowe Howard-Spink
Ogilvy and Mather
Portland
Poster Media
Poster Publicity
Posterlink
Saatchi and Saatchi
Waldron Allen Henry and Thompson
Wight Collins Rutherford Scott
Yellowhammer
Young and Rubicam

1987
Abbott Mead Vickers/SMS
Ayer Barker/Charles Barker
Baillie Marshall
BBDO
Benton & Bowles Recruitment
BSB Dorland
Butler Dennis & Garland
CDP Financial
CDP Waterhouse
Cogent Elliott
Collett Dickenson Pearce & Partners
Davidson Pearce
Dewe Rogerson
Doyle Dane Bernbach
Faulds
FCO
Gold Greenlees Trott
Hall Advertising
J. Walter Thompson
Leo Burnett
Lintas
Northern Communications
Ogilvy & Mather
Saatchi & Saatchi
Slaymaker Cowley White/BDG
Still Price Court Twivy D'Souza
Waldron Allen Henry & Thompson
Wight Collins Rutherford Scott
Woolward McCanns
Yellowhammer

1988
Abbott Mead Vickers/SMS
Ayer Barker
BMP Davidson Pearce
Boase Massimi Pollitt
Butterfield Day Devito Hockney
Cogent Elliott
Collett Dickenson Pearce & Partners
D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
Davidson Pearce
DDB Needham
Delaney Fletcher Delaney
Dewe Rogerson
FCO
Gold Greenlees Trott
J. Walter Thompson
Leo Burnett
Lowe Howard-Spink
Ogilvy & Mather
Saatchi & Saatchi
Slaymaker Cowley White/BDG
TBWA
Waldron Allen Henry & Thompson
WCRS Mathews Marcantonio
Yellowhammer
Young & Rubicam

1989
Abbott Mead Vickers/SMS
Ayer Barker
Benton and Bowles Recruitment
BMP Davidson Pearce
Butterfield Day Devito Hockney
Cogent Elliott
Collett Dickenson Pearce and Partners
Concord and Posterlink
D'Arcy Masius Benton and Bowles
DDB Needham
Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney and Bozell
FCO Ltd.
Gold Greenlees Trott
Harrison Salinson
J. Walter Thompson
Leo Burnett
Lowe Howard-Spink
Ogilvy and Mather
Portland Outdoor Advertising
Poster Publicity Ltd.
Publicis
Riley
Saatchi and Saatchi
TBWA
Waldron Allen Henry and Thompson
Yellowhammer

1990
Allen Brady and Marsh
Baillie Marshall
Bridge/Alliance
Butterfield Day Devito Hockney
Collett Dickenson Pearce and Partners
The Creative Business
D'Arcy Masius Benton and Bowles
Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney and Bozell
Dorland Business Communications
Faulds
Gold Greenlees Trott
Hall Advertising
IPS Advertising
J. Walter Thompson
Laing Henry Hill Holliday
Leagas Delaney
The Leith Agency
Leo Burnett
McCann-Erickson
Media Audits
Ogilvy and Mather
Saatchi and Saatchi
TBWA
WCRS
Yellowhammer
Young and Rubicam

1991
Abbott Mead Vickers/SMS
B & B Bernard Hodes
Barkers LBW
Bartle Bogle Hegarty
BMP DDB Needham
Butterfield Day Devito Hockney
CIA Billett & Company
Cogent
Collett Dickenson Pearce & Partners

Colman RSCG
The Creative Business
D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney & Bozell
FCO Ltd
Gold Greenlees Trott
Golley Slater
Hall Harrison Cowley
Laing Henry Hill Holliday
Leagas Delaney
Leo Burnett
Lowe Howard-Spink
Media System
Miller and Leeves WAHT
MSL
Ogilvy & Mather
PA
Riley
RS/Alliance
Saatchi & Saatchi
WCRS
Yellowhammer
Young & Rubicam
Zenith

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an analysis, parallel to that given by the Chief Secretary on 23 May, *Official Report*, columns *583-4*, of *(a)* local authority capital expenditure in Scotland which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland tabulated by function and *(b)* local authority capital expenditure in Wales which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested, consistent with that given in the statistical supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement (Cm 1520), is given in the tables.

Local authority net capital expenditure in Scotland on functions outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland by function

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Trade, industry, energy and employment	1	—	1	—	—	—
Transport	2	2	1	1	1	1
Total	2	2	2	1	1	1

Local authority net capital expenditure in Wales which falls outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales by function

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Transport	1	—	—	—	—	—
Law, order and protective services	9	10	13	12	17	7
Total	10	10	13	12	17	7

Note: Figures have been independently rounded therefore, some individual figures do not always equal the total shown.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the breakdown for the years 1985-86 to 1990-91 of the entry for current grants to persons as given in the analysis of 15 April, *Official Report*, column *130*, of local authority expenditure in Scotland on functions outside the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested, consistent with that given in the statistical supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement (Cm. 1520), is given in the table.

Local authority current grants to persons in Scotland on functions outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland by type of grant

£ million

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Rent allowances	56	72	89	85	105	143
Rent rebates	229	263	296	315	351	385
Total	285	335	386	400	456	528

Note
Figures have been independently rounded therefore, some individual figures do not always equal the total shown.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an analysis, comparable with table 5.8 of Cm. 1520 showing *(a)* that local authority expenditure in Scotland which falls outside expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland, tabulated not by function but by departmental programme and *(b)* that local authority expenditure in Wales which falls outside expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales tabulated not by function but by departmental programme.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested for local authority current expenditure, consistent with that given in table 5.8 of the statistical supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement (Cm. 1520), is given in the tables.

Local authority current expenditure in Scotland on functions outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland by department.

£ million

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Intervention Board						
School milk and meals	3	4	4	3	3	8
Department of Trade and Industry						
Consumer protection	5	5	6	7	7	8
Department of Employment						
Help for unemployed people	3	4	3	8	6	7
Department of Social Security						
Rent rebates	229	263	296	315	351	385
Rent allowances	56	72	89	85	105	143
Housing benefit administration	13	14	19	19	21	25
TOTAL	299	349	404	419	476	553
TOTAL	311	362	417	437	492	576

Note: Figures have been independently rounded therefore, some individual figures do not always equal the total shown.

Local authority current expenditure in Wales on functions outside the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales by function.

£ million

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Intervention Board						
School milk and meals	1	1	1	1	1	1
Department of Trade and Industry						
Consumer protection	5	5	5	6	6	7
Department of Employment						
Help for unemployed people	2	2	3	3	3	3
Home Office						
Courts	9	10	11	11	13	15
Probation	8	9	10	10	12	14
Police	134	145	160	176	197	217
Civil defence	1	1	1	2	2	2
Fire	36	37	41	45	49	54
Electoral registration	1	2	2	2	2	2
TOTAL	189	204	225	246	275	304
Department of Education and Science						
Student awards	45	46	49	53	60	75
Department of Social Security						
Rent rebates	128	134	135	148	155	152
Rent allowances	40	49	49	53	59	74
Housing benefit administration	6	7	9	8	8	14
TOTAL	174	190	192	209	222	240
TOTAL	416	448	475	518	568	631

Note: Figures have been independently rounded therefore, some individual figures do not always equal the total shown.

Unemployment Costs

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he makes of the average weekly cost to the Exchequer for each unemployed person taking into account benefit paid, staff costs for administering the benefit agency, costs of job clubs, jobcentres, restart schemes and associated costs.

Mr. Mellor: The cost to the Exchequer for each unemployed person will depend on the person's family and other circumstances, contribution record, any tax liability, and the administrative costs of assessing and paying benefit and helping find new employment. An estimate of the benefit element of this is given in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94: Social Security" (Cm 1514), page 11, table 8.

Advertising Agencies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham of 2 July, *Official Report*, columns *87-88*, what list the Advisory Committee on Advertising maintains of agencies considered suitable for nomination to work for government.

Mr. Maples: The Advisory Committee on Advertising has wide knowledge and experience of many advertising agencies but does not maintain a standing list of agencies considered suitable to compete for Government work.

Consideration of suitability for nomination is made to meet the circumstances of each separate competition.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria are used by the Advisory Committee on Advertising to decide whether an agency may be nominated for Government business.

Mr. Maples: Advertising agencies are nominated to compete for Government business by the Advisory Committee on Advertising when the Committee considers that the agency's competence, experience and performance match the requirements of a particular competition.

Pension Funds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total revenue foregone to the Exchequer over a financial year of *(a)* individual contributions to pension funds being tax free for (i) standard rate payers and (ii) higher rate payers, *(b)* the income and capital gains of pension funds being tax exempt and *(c)* the facility open to an individual of taking up to a quarter of their accrued pension rights as a lump sum payment free from tax.

Mr. Maude: The latest available estimates for 1990-91 are as follows.

Relief for	*£ million*
Employee contributions to occupational pension schemes[1 2]	2,200
Investment income of occupational pension schemes[1 3]	4,900
Lump sum payments to pensioners[1]	1,000
Contributions to personal pensions (including retirement annuity premia and FSAVCs)[4 5]	1,100

[1] The total cost of tax reliefs for occupational pension schemes cannot be calculated by adding together the cost of individual reliefs as this would imply a considerable degree of multiple taxation.

[2] It is not possible to provide a reliable breakdown of the total cost of relief between basic rate and higher rate taxpayers.

[3] Assuming relief at the basic rate of income tax.

[4] Including income tax relief on employers' contributions to personal pensions on the basis that under present arrangements employers' contributions are not taxable as a benefit in kind of the employee.

[5] It is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the cost of exemption for investment income and lump sum payments related to retirement annuity contracts and personal pensions.

London Allowance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rate of London allowance for civil servants in support and executive grades respectively since 1987; if he will make it his policy to submit requests for adjustment to arbitration; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is as follows.

London weighting allowance

	1 April 1987 £	*1 July 1988* £
Inner	1,527	1,750
Intermediate	876	1,000
Outer	641	725

London weighting for civil servants has not been increased since 1988. However, since 1988 London pay points worth between 4 per cent. and 7 per cent., depending on grade, have been introduced for most civil servants in London, along with local pay additions worth up to £1,000 a year targeted at locations with severe recruitment and retention problems.

Over the past two years, over £87 million a year has been spent enhancing London pay in this way, in addition to national pay increases. This represents an increase of over 50 per cent. in the London element of the pay bill. Unlike London weighting, London spine points and local pay additions are targeted to ensure that public money is used most cost-effectively. Over the past two years, recruitment and retention rates in London have improved very significantly.

The Government's policy is that pay should be based on what is required to recruit, retain and motivate within what is affordable. The Government's intention is to continue to set London pay in accordance with that policy and, where appropriate, to target increases in the London element of pay to ensure that they produce the best value for money for the taxpayer.

Successive Governments have reserved the right not to go to arbitration on issues which raise policy considerations. In previous years London weighting claims have raised policy issues in respect of public expenditure control and the targeting of pay increases to secure best value for money on which arbitration would not have been appropriate.

Scotch Whisky

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what formal proposals have been made by him to European colleagues to protect the export of Scotch whisky to the Community; what further discussions he intends to hold with EC colleagues on the implications of an EC indirect tax scheme for Scotch whisky exports to the rest of the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: At the ECOFIN Council on 24 June, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer successfully argued against the proposal to set a minimum level of spirits duty post-1992 which would have unacceptably increased discrimination against Scotch whisky in the southern member states. As a result, no minimum rate was agreed and at my right hon. Friend's request the Commission will be examining possible distortions in the alcoholic drinks market and reporting later this year. Further discussions on the minimum rate will take place on the basis of that report.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total annual value accruing to the Treasury of *(a)* domestic and *(b)* international sales of Scotch whisky.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information available relates to the VAT and excise duty yield from domestic sales of whisky which in 1990 is estimated to have been £1 billion. International sales do not produce excise or VAT revenue.

Single European Currency

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out his current assessment of the effect of a single currency on the annual gross domestic product of the European Community.

Mr. Maude: It is too early to predict what the effect of a single currency would be on Community GDP. Potential benefits might accrue from reductions in transactions costs and exchange rate risk, and lower inflation. But compared to existing ERM arrangements, a single currency does not of itself guarantee lower inflation or reduced exchange rate risk against non-Community currencies, and the transactions cost advantages are unlikely to be large. Moreover, the success of any move to a single currency would depend on Community economies first having achieved sufficient sustainable convergence in terms of inflation rates, interest rates, budget deficits and market flexibility. Otherwise there would be adverse effects on Community GDP and unemployment.

Sterling M3

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, column 567, if he will provide the information requested for sterling M3 for the relevant periods prior to cessation of the publication.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information requested is shown in the following table:

12-month growth rates of sterling M3

Financial year	*Percentage change*
June 1979-March 1980	[1]9·9
1980-81	17·9
1981-82	14·7
1982-83	11·8
1983-84	8·0
1984-85	11·5
1985-86	16·7
1986-87	18·8
1987-88	20·9
1988-89	20·2

[1] Change between June 1979, and March 1980, at an annual rate.

ECOFIN

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels on 8 July. The Minister for Corporate Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council held a discussion of economic convergence within the Community as part of the regular multilateral surveillance of the economies of member states. The Council agreed that greater progress towards economic convergence was desirable and that, where necessary, member states would submit medium-term economic programmes to promote convergence. The Council's conclusions have today been placed in the Library in accordance with article 8 of the 1990 convergence decision.

The revised annual economic report was adopted, a copy of which is also in the Library.

Over lunch there was a brief procedural discussion of EMU in which it was agreed that the next ministerial meeting of the IGC would be held on 9 September.

The investment services directive was again discussed, but without further agreement. The Minister for Corporate Affairs continued to argue for a liberal and market-sensitive directive.

Lending outside the Community by the European investment bank was also discussed. The Council agreed to return to the technical and financial aspects of this question in the autumn on the basis of a report by the Commission and the EIB. It was agreed that in the meantime the bank could consider extending loans to countries with which the Community had a co-operation agreement on a case-by-case basis in accordance with its existing statute.

The agreement by the European Council to offer a balance of payments loan to Algeria was discussed, but no agreement was reached as to the amount or details of such a loan.

It was agreed that a loan guaranteed by the Community of up to 375 million ecu should also be offered to Romania provided that each tranche was matched by equal contributions from members of the G24 outside the Community and other countries.

The Council also adopted a declaration on the Commission's report on countering fraud against the Community budget in 1990, setting out additional objectives for the year ahead; and the United Kingdom made a brief statement stressing the importance of this issue and the need to monitor results, and welcoming the agreement to review the scope of the Commission's 45-point action plan in the light of experience.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

ODA Budget

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent from the Overseas Development Administration budget for each of the past 10 years, in terms of 1991 prices, on construction and infrastructural projects in developing nations, where a United Kingdom company was the only or main contractor.

Mrs. Chalker: ODA projects are classified by recipient country sector for records purposes. Details of construction and infrastructure projects where a United Kingdom contractor was involved could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Aid

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid is given by the United Kingdom to *(a)* Benin, *(b)* Burundi, *(c)* Comoros, *(d)* Equatorial Guinea, *(e)* Ghana, *(f)* Guinea, *(g)* Kenya, *(h)* Liberia, *(i)* Madagasgar, *(j)* Malawi, *(k)* Mali, *(l)* Mauritania, *(m)* Mozambique, *(n)* Myanmar, *(o)* Niger, *(p)* Sao Tome and Principe, *(q)* Sierra Leone, *(r)* Somalia, *(s)* Sudan, *(t)* Tanzania, *(u)* Togo, *(v)* Zaire, *(w)* Zambia, *(x)* Guinea-Bissau, *(y)* Guyana and *(z)* Nigeria.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom's gross bilateral aid during 1989, the most recent year for which figures are currently available, was as follows:

Country	£ 000s
Benin	331
Burundi	152
Comoros	7
Equatorial Guinea	84
Ghana	50,206
Guinea	456
Kenya	53,941
Liberia	613
Madagascar	316
Malawi	43,114
Mali	1,156
Mauritania	152
Mozambique	22,431
Burma	699
Niger	281
Sao Tome and Principe	—
Sierra Leone	2,808
Somalia	5,295
Sudan	31,436
Tanzania	38,056
Togo	278
Zaire	728
Zambia	19,711
Guinea-Bissau	41
Guyana	6,561
Nigeria	62,963

Development aid programmes to Sudan and Somalia were suspended in 1991. Aid to Burma was suspended in 1988 and the amount shown for 1989 covered residual payments and ongoing costs of trainees already in Britain.

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract.

Mrs. Chalker: The chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute is paid as a grade 3 in the civil service. Currently the London rate is £51,300 with a salary range up to a maximum of £59,000 including performance-related pay. The present chief executive was appointed for two years in the first instance ending 31 March 1992.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mrs. Chalker: The present chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute has a first degree in economics from Cambridge university.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of the Natural Resources Institute as an executive agency; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency;

(2) how many staff were in post on the date that the Natural Resources Institute was established as an executive agency; and how many staff are in post now;

(3) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into the Natural Resources Institute since its establishment as an executive agency; and if he will give a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern;

(4) what appointments from the private sector have been made to the Natural Resources Institute at grade 7 or above since its establishment as an agency; and if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related element;

(5) if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by the Natural Resources Institute since its establishment as an executive agency identifying separately those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status;

(6) if he will list those new facilities for staff including nurseries and healthcare schemes, which have been introduced in the Natural Resources Institute since its establishment as an executive agency;

(7) what group bonus schemes are in operation in the Natural Resources Institute; and if he will state the cash amount per person awarded in the last year for which figures are available, and the conditions attached to its award;

(8) when the last annual report for the Natural Resources Institute was published; and when the next one is due.

Mrs. Chalker: I have asked the chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute to write to the hon. Member.

Kurds

Mr, Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his written answers to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on 25 April, *Official Report*, columns *507-8*, 2 May, *Official Report*, column *288*, and 15 May, *Official Report*, column *192-94*, if he will update the information supplied concerning aid to the Kurds.

Mrs. Chalker: *(a)* As of 10 July, the Overseas Development Administration has provided a further 293 tonnes of relief supplies as described in the table:

Agency	Date	Aircraft	Tonnage	Destination
ODA	6 May	1 × Boeing 707	6	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	16 May	1 × Boeing 707	19	Orumiyeh, Iran
ODA	18 May	1 × Boeing 707	30	Orumiyeh, Iran
ODA	20 May	2 × Boeing 707	60	Diyarbakir, Turkey
ODA	24 May	1 × Boeing 707	38	Tabriz, Iran
ODA	27 May	1 × Boeing 707	12	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	1 June	2 × Boeing 707	23	Diyarbakir, Turkey
ODA	2 June	1 × Boeing 707	16	Incerlik, Turkey
ODA	2 June	1 × Boeing 707	11	Diyarbakir, Turkey
ODA	4 June	1 × Boeing 707	11	Diyarbakir, Turkey
ODA	5 June	1 × Belfast	19	Diyarbakir, Turkey
ODA	6 June	1 × Boeing 707	13	Diyarbakir, Turkey
ODA	9 June	1 × Belfast	19	Diyarbakir, Turkey

Agency	Date	Aircraft	Tonnage	Destination
ODA	3 July	not known	3	Tehran, Iran
ODA	10 July	not known	13	Tehran, Iran

In addition, the British Red Cross Society and the voluntary organisation British Aid for the Kurds have provided the following further information about their relief supplies:

Agency	Date	Aircraft	Tonnage	Destination
BRCS	29 April	1 × Boeing 707	41	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	1 May	1 × DC8	38	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	3 May	1 × DC8	38	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	5 May	1 × DC8	38	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	7 May	1 × DC8	38	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	9 May	1 × DC8	39	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	11 May	1 × DC8	39	Orumiyeh, Iran
BRCS	17 May	1 × DC8	40	Baghdad, Iraq
BRCS	22 May	1 × DC8	39	Tehran, Iran
BAK	24 April	1 × Boeing 747	75	Tehran, Iran
BAK	25 April	1 × Boeing 707	[1]33	Tehran, Iran
BAK	26 April	1 × Boeing 747	88	Tehran, Iran
BAK	1 May	1 × Boeing 747	50	Tehran, Iran
BAK	8 May	1 × Boeing 747	44	Tehran, Iran
BAK	10 May	1 × Boeing 747	[1]65	Tehran, Iran
BAK	15 May	1 × Boeing 747	60	Tehran, Iran
BAK	22 May	1 × Boeing 747	[1]30	Tehran, Iran
BAK	29 May	1 × Boeing 747	5	Tehran, Iran
BAK	5 June	1 × Boeing 747	27	Tehran, Iran
BAK	12 June	1 × Boeing 747	not known	Tehran, Iran
BAK	3 July	1 × Boeing 747	[1]47	Tehran, Iran

[1] Denotes ODA charter.

(b) The aircraft carrying the supplies described by British Aid for the Kurds on 25 April, 10 may, 22 May and 3 July were chartered by the Overseas Development Administration.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Wild Birds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the regulations and controls that over the export or re-export of wild birds; and, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *498*, how many of the imported wild birds are subsequently re-exported.

Mr. Maclean: The Transit of Animals (General) Order 1973, as amended, lays down a number of general measures designed to safeguard the welfare of a wide variety of animals, including captive birds, during their transportation to, from or within Great Britain.

Animal health conditions for the export or re-export of captive birds are laid down by the veterinary authorities of the countries of destination and it would be impracticable to publish in the *Official Report* the numerous export health certificates which exist.

Controls under CITES and the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Ministry has no information on the number of imported captive birds which are subsequently re-exported.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many white-fronted Amazon parrots were imported into the United Kingdom in 1988; and what proportion died either in transit or while in quarantine;

(2) how many crimson seed-cracker species of wild bird were imported into the United Kingdom in 1988; and what proportion suffered mortality either in transit or while in quarantine.

Mr. Maclean: Information on mortality in birds imported into Great Britain is given in the Ministry's publications "Importation of Birds—Mortality Statistics from Quarantine Returns", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

In 1988, 489 white-fronted Amazons *(Amazona albifrons)* were imported, of which 376 were dead on arrival or died in quarantine. The figures for crimson seedcracker *(Pyrenestes sanquineus)* were 20 and 19 respectively.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has received from the veterinary investigations service concerning the importation and quarantine of wild-caught birds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The veterinary investigations service is not directly involved in advising on the health conditions under which captive birds are imported and quarantined. Its role in this respect is to report to the state veterinary service the outcome of tests on the carcases of birds submitted for post-mortem examination as required by the terms of import licences.

Scotch Whisky

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total volume and value of exports of Scotch whisky to *(a)* Europe, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Japan at the most recent available date.

Mr. Curry: In 1990, exports of whisky to the destinations specified were as follows:

	£ million	*Million litres of pure alcohol*
European Community	631	89
United States of America	276	47
Japan	178	21

Note: Includes small quantities of Northern Irish whiskey, Bourbon and immature plain cereal spirits.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total volume and value of exports of Scotch whisky in each of the past five years.

Mr. Curry: In the past five years, exports of Scotch whisky were as follows:

	£ million	*Million litres of pure alcohol*
1986	1,070	236
1987	1,136	240
1988	1,289	246
1989	1,470	242
1990	1,712	238

Note: The figures include small quantities of Northern Irish whiskey.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of total agricultural land in environmentally sensitive areas is subject to ESA agreements; and what percentage of ESA target areas is covered by such agreements.

Mr. Curry: In the 10 ESAs in England there are 115,960 hectares covered by agreements. This represents 45 per cent. of the potentially eligible agricultural land. The schemes do not target particular areas of eligible land, but as an indicator of the success of uptake, targets were set of 75 per cent. of eligible grassland and 10 per cent. of eligible arable land. The area covered by agreements represents 92 per cent. of these targets.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *75*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each publicity campaign.

Mr. Curry: MAFF's touring exhibition, currently taking consumer information to major shopping centres and agricultural shows, commenced its programme on 20 May 1991 and is scheduled to finish on 5 October 1991. The revision of the Department's range of publications on food is still in hand.

SCOTLAND

NHS Staff

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the percentage change in the number of administrative and clerical staff in the national health service in Scotland between September 1979 and the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The percentage of all personnel in the national health service in Scotland who were classified as administrative and clerical for statistical purposes was 10·9 per cent. in September 1979 and 12·9 per cent. in September 1990: the corresponding percentages for medical and nursing personnel were 53·8 per cent. and 59·6 per cent. respectively. The figures for administrative and clerical staff include staff engaged in clinically related work and the 1990 figures also include general and senior management grades which contain a number of professional and technical staff.

Careers Service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent through the careers service strengthening scheme in Scotland in each year since 1979, expressed both in current prices and in actual sums spent.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

£000

Year	*Actual expenditure*	*Expenditure at 1990 prices*
1979-80	544	1,176
1980-81	723	1,321
1981-82	937	1,561
1982-83	1,329	2,067
1983-84	1,645	2,446
1984-85	1,664	2,355
1985-86	1,697	2,278
1986-87	1,791	2,323
1987-88	1,887	2,324
1988-89	2,034	2,331
1989-90	2,205	2,376
1990-91	2,247	2,247

Hospital Waste

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *713*, what studies have been undertaken into the possibility that waste from NHS hospitals in Scotland could enter into water supplies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am not aware of any specific studies into this subject area. However, all public water supplies are monitored by the water authorities and no reports have been received of any problems of this sort.

Fisheries (Restrictions)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will introduce changes in the administration of the eight-day tie-up regulations to prevent discrimination against smaller ports with limited repair facilities;

(2) what changes he has considered in the implementation of the eight-day tie-up regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This Government must administer the eight-day tie-up scheme in line with the terms of EC regulation No. 3926/90. However, we are always prepared to consider specific administrative changes in the application of the eight-day scheme provided that they do not conflict with that responsibility. Each case brought to our attention is considered individually and arrangements are made where possible.

Local Authority Usable Receipts

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate for local authority usable receipts in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* In Scotland, all local authority receipts are usable in the year in which they are generated. My right hon. Friend's estimate of local authority housing receipts in 1991-92 is £248 million. He has, as yet, made no estimate of housing receipts for 1992-93. He has made no estimate of non-housing receipts for either year.

British Steel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what information he received on 4 June concerning the plate mill review in British Steel; what subsequent representations were made by the Scottish Office; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will detail the meetings he, his junior Ministers or his officials have had with the chairman or officials of British Steel from the beginning of June 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* My right hon. Friend and I last met the chairman of British Steel on 4 June, when we were told in strict confidence of the company's decision to invest in new plate facilities at Teesside.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what statements he has made to the British Steel chairman about his policy on the plate mill closure;

(2) what public statements he has made on the future of plate-making facilities at Dalzell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* It would not be appropriate to disclose details of my right hon. Friend's discussions with the chairman of British Steel which are bound by commercial confidentiality. But we have consistently pressed British Steel over a long period, publicly and in private, to give full consideration to the case for investment at Dalzell.

NORTHERN IRELAND

International Investments Ltd.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what representations have been made to the Government of the Irish Republic and the United States Government regarding the collapse of International Investments Ltd., Gibraltar, (in liquidation);

(2) what action has been taken to date by the Royal Ulster Constabulary regarding the collapse of International Investments Ltd., Gibraltar, (in liquidation);

(3) whether he will seek assurance from the Government of the Irish Republic that the persons responsible for misappropriation of moneys invested by United Kingdom citizens in International Investments Ltd. will be made amenable to prosecution.

Dr. Mawhinney: International Investments Ltd. was a company registered in Gibraltar and not in the United Kingdom. The liquidation is therefore a matter for the authorities in Gibraltar and the responsibility for making representations to other Governments regarding International Investments Ltd. does not lie with Her Majesty's Government.

Further to the RUC investigation into allegations of fraud by the principals of International Investments Ltd., the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland has directed that one person be charged with conspiracy to fraud. The investigations are still continuing.

Stormont Talks (Expenditure)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the remuneration and expenses agreed for the chairman of the second strand of the talks at Stormont, Sir Ninian Stephen; and what proportion will be contributed by *(a)* the Government of the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the statement that I made in the House on 3 July 1991 at columns 319-20.

As the talks which were held on the basis of my statement of 26 March 1991 have now concluded without the second strand having commenced, these questions do not arise.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hospitals have been closed in each year since 1974.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* The information is:

Year	*Number*
1974	—
1975	—
1976	1
1977	1
1978	—
1979	—
1980	—
1981	2
1982	2
1983	1
1984	—
1985	1
1986	9
1987	1
1988	8
1989	2
1990	2
1991	1

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

18. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to publish any regulations on local government finance prior to the summer adjournment.

Mr. Key: Subject to final decisions, my Department expects to lay three statutory instruments covering amendments to the non-domestic rating transitional arrangements and the payment of interest to ratepayers, and minor amendments and consequential repeals under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

35. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outline financial settlement for local authorities for 1992-93.

Mr. Key: When he is ready to do so.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which areas of central Government support to local authorities are calculated on the basis of *(a)* the electoral roll and *(b)* OPCS calculations.

Mr. Key: The electoral roll is not used directly in the provision of central Government support to local authorities. However, the annual mid-year estimates of the resident population produced by OPCS are based partly on changes in the electoral roll from year to year. These estimates, along with census data and other indicators, are used to calculate the standard spending assessments and hence the level of revenue support grant appropriate to each local authority.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish population figures for each standard region in England for the years 1981-82 to 1991-92, on the same basis as was used to calculate per capita standard spending assessments in his written answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *10*.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is shown in the table. There is a lag of nearly two years before the mid-year population estimate is available for inclusion in standard spending assessments. The year shown at the head of the columns refers to the year of the calculated standard spending assessment.

A table showing population figures on the same basis as those used to calculate per capita standard spending assessments
OPCS mid-year estimates

Local authority	*1987-88 resident population 1*	*1988-89 resident population 2*	*1989-90 resident population 3*	*1990-91 resident population 4*	*1991-92 resident population 5*
Total England	47,111,701	47,254,459	47,406,652	47,536,278	47,689,395
Regional summary					
Northern Region	3,085,700	3,080,242	3,076,779	3,071,318	3,073,112
North West	6,386,300	6,734,334	6,370,079	6,364,162	6,379,723
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,902,600	4,899,285	4,900,232	4,913,298	4,940,355
East Midlands	3,896,900	3,919,918	3,942,254	3,970,599	3,999,063
West Midlands	5,183,000	5,181,243	5,197,687	5,207,000	5,215,960
East Anglia	1,964,700	1,991,600	2,013,680	2,034,639	2,044,577
South West	4,500,780	4,543,254	4,588,374	4,634,235	4,652,426
South East	10,424,300	10,489,393	10,547,132	10,605,020	10,627,779
Greater London	6,767,421	6,775,190	6,770,435	6,736,007	6,756,400

Community Charge

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans any measures to improve the ability of local councils to collect the outstanding community charge sums.

Mr. Portillo: We believe the enforcement powers now available to local authorities should enable them to collect the charge effectively. We are proposing some minor changes to the attachment of earnings process.

31 **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to take measures to ensure that armed forces personnel within the United Kingdom pay their community charge, and that those serving overseas may be exempted.

Mr. Key: Members of the armed forces are subject to the community charge and its enforcement procedures in the same way as everyone else. Although we do not intend specifically to exempt armed forces who serve overseas, those who do so and move their sole or main residence from this country will not be liable to pay the community charge.

Rents to Mortgages Scheme

20. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to extend the areas where council tenants may turn their council rents into mortgages; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: This is a possibility that we shall want to keep under review as the pilot schemes progress.

National Rivers Authority

21. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work and funding of the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Trippier: The NRA is continuing to develop its role as a powerful and independent regulator and guardian of the water environment. It has been very substantially helped to do so by our making available a 28 per cent. increase in grant-in-aid in the current year compared with previous provision. It will also have available an estimated £25 million from the scheme of charges in respect of discharge consents which is now being implemented and extra income from abstraction licence holders.

Public Sector House Building

22. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for public sector house building; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The latest estimates of public sector house building in England, mainly by local authorities, show 12,000 completions in the year to May 1991, of which 2,400 were in the latest three months.

Housing associations are becoming the major providers of new subsidised rented housing and their output is forecast to rise significantly over the next three years.

Full details of house building by sector are published monthly by the Department in an information bulletin.

Humberside

23. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the publication of the final report from the Local Government Boundary Commission on the future of the county of Humberside.

Mr. Key: The report was published on Wednesday 3 July.

Council House Sales

24. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in England since May 1979.

Mr. Heseltine: Between April 1979 and March 1991, about one and a quarter million tenants bought their homes from English local authorities and new towns.

Standard Spending Assessments

25. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to make changes to the system for setting the levels of standard spending assessments for local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: We have no proposals for any major changes to the SSA methodology, although information from the 1991 census will be incorporated into SSAs as soon as it is available for all authorities.

Water Companies

26. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the water company chairmen to discuss the quality of their services.

Mr. Trippier: I met the chairmen of the water companies only last week. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside will meet the chairmen of the water and sewerage companies later in the year. The topics for discussion naturally include the unprecedented investment programme the industry is carrying out to improve the quality of its services.

Greenhouse Gases

27. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about further progress on tackling the problem of greenhouse gases.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom remains fully committed to the negotiation of an effective framework convention on climate change in time for it to be opened for signature at the June 1992 UN conference on environment and development. Reasonable progress towards this objective was made at the second meeting of the intergovernmental negotiating committee which took place in Geneva last month.

Local Authority Publications

28. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the powers of the district audit regarding the political content of local authority publications.

Mr. Key: The powers of the auditor in respect of illegal expenditure on political publications are the same as those which apply to any item of illegal expenditure. We believe that the auditor's powers in this area are sufficient and have no plans to review them at present.

Local Government (Employment)

29. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on employment in local government.

Mr. Key: The total number employed in local government in England has fallen by 4 per cent. since 1979.

That there has been an overall reduction is in large part due to Government action in abolishing the metropolitan counties and GLC, removing bus and airport companies from local authority control, and later removing polytechnics from local government.

The Government's policies both in encouraging councils to make use of the private sector through competitive tendering and in encouraging greater efficiency in the delivery of services should exert a strong downward pressure on staff numbers.

Dog Wardens

30. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local authorities employ dog wardens; and how many prosecutions they have instituted.

Mr. Baldry: I am advised by the National Dog Warden Association that some 200 dog wardens are employed by local authorities, but some authorities employ more than one warden and others share a warden. Local authority dog wardens are responsible for enforcing a variety of dog control measures, including "poop scoop", dog ban and dogs on leads byelaws. There are no central records of the number of prosecutions.

Beach Pollution

32. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet the chairman of Anglian Water plc to discuss beach pollution.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend and I maintain regular contacts with the Anglian Water Company about progress on the bathing water improvement programme.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

33. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the extension of compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), earlier today to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Council Housing

34. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the quality of the management of council housing; and what information he has on the latest position with regard to *(a)* rent arrears, *(b)* empty properties and *(c)* council house sales.

Mr. Yeo: In 1989 the Department published a report by the centre for housing research, Glasgow university, entitled "The Nature and Effectiveness of Housing Management in England", which evaluated the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local authorities and housing associations as landlords.

A follow-up study on the effectiveness of housing management under the new financial regimes for local authorities and housing associations is currently being carried out by the centre for housing studies, York university, and is due to report in 1992.

The latest available information on council tenants' arrears relates to the position at the end of March 1990. Estimated total rent arrears for all English local authorities at that date were £360 million.

The latest available information on empty council dwellings in England relates to 1 April 1990. At that date some 99,400 were vacant.

Some 1·3 million English local authority or new town properties have been sold into owner-occupation between April 1979 and March 1991. In addition 16 local authorities have transferred their remaining stock to housing associations or to private companies.

Short-term Leasing

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the value for money of short-term leasing of properties by housing authorities to accommodate the homeless as against bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Sir George Young: My assessment is that leasing is usually preferable both on social and cost grounds to the use of bed-and-breakfast hotels in accommodating homeless families.

Water Quality

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the changes in the level of quality of Britain's highest grade rivers since 1989.

Mr. Trippier: The National Rivers Authority intends to publish later this year the results of its 1990 river quality survey.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what progress has been made in setting water quality objectives under section 105 of the Water Act 1989;

(2) if he will make it his policy to include in future water quality objectives for inland waters provision for designation of contact water sport areas and to require such designated areas to meet the provisions of European Community directive 76/160/EEC concerning the quality of bathing water;

(3) which organisations have been asked to give their views on the new statutory water quality objectives;

(4) if he will make it his policy to publish the new water quality objectives before May 1992.

Mr. Trippier: We have asked the National Rivers Authority to advise the Department on the establishment of the new system of statutory water quality objectives provided for under the Water Act 1989. Discussions on this are continuing and proposals will be issued for public consultation in due course. The new arrangements will be consistent with the requirements of the relevant EC directives.

Discharges

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that all environmentally sensitive discharges with numeric limits should include absolute limits that may not be exceeded at any time.

Mr. Trippier: Last year the National Rivers Authority issued for public consultation its reviews of the discharge consent system. This covered a wide range of issues relating to consent setting and compliance, including the use of absolute limits. The NRA is currently considering the comments it has received.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases there have been of unauthorised discharges into the River Lea, Limehouse Cut, Hertford Union canal and Regents canal in the last 10 years, giving details of the source of the discharge and the quantities involved.

Mr. Baldry: Information on unauthorised discharges since 1989 is held by the National Rivers Authority, Thames region.

No information is available for the years prior to 1989.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for the last available year, the percentage of (i) paper, (ii) cardboard, (iii) ferrous metals, (iv) non-ferrous metals, (v) sump oil, (vi) mercury and (vii) cadmium recoverd as a percentage of consumption in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each of the other European Community countries.

Mr. Baldry: The available figures are as follows:

(i) and (ii) the figures for 1989[1] are:

	Percentage
Belgium	35·2
Denmark	33·2
France	34·4
Germany	43·0
Greece	n/a
Ireland	n/a
Italy	25·7
Luxembourg	*
Netherlands	49·0
Portugal	39·1
Spain	38·7
United Kingdom	30·4

The figure for the United Kingdom in 1990 was 33 per cent.

(iii) the available figures (for domestic supply of scrap as a proportion of consumption of finished steel) for 1988[2] are:

	Percentage
Belgium	84·4
France	79·6
Germany	69·6
Italy	44·9
Netherlands	86·3
Spain	56·8
United Kingdom	74·7

(iv) the United Kingdom figure for aluminium is 42 per cent.[3], excluding the use of imported scrap.

Sources:

[1] British Paper and Board Industry Federation.
[2] United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
[3] Warren Spring Laboratory.
[4] Included with Belgium.

The other figures are not held centrally and so cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Domestic Rates

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total amount of domestic rates remaining uncollected in April of each year since 1979 in Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Key: Information is available only for gross rate arrears, domestic and non-domestic combined, for the years since 1980.

Gross rate arrears at 1 April for Tower Hamlets

	£ 000s
1980	2,015
1981	1,723
1982	2,911
1983	3,147
1984	3,400
1985	3,680
1986	3,448
1987	2,942
1988	5,443
1989	4,240
1990	6,709

Watercourse Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the comparative deleterious effects of the discharge of *(a)* cream, *(b)* alcohol and *(c)* raw sewage into fresh watercourses from processing and manufacturing plants.

Mr. Baldry: The control of discharges to freshwaters is a matter for the National Rivers Authority. In general discharges of cream, alcohol or raw sewage would be expected to have a deleterious effect on freshwaters and would therefore not be permitted.

Guest Houses

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many guest houses are registered to pay uniform business rates.

Mr. Key: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

House Building (Leicester)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in the private and the public sector were completed in the years 1979 and 1990, respectively, in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Yeo: The figures for 1979 are shown in table 4(b) of "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales", No. 59 (November 1981) and, for 1990, in table 1(a) of No. 97 (April 1991). Copies are in the Library.

Litter

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many litter abatement orders have been obtained and how many litter abatement notices have been served under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in the three months since 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: This information not held centrally by my Department.

The number of orders made or notices served is not necessarily an indicator of the success, or failure, of the legislation. They are designed primarily as deterrent measures. We would expect aggrieved citizens to exercise their powers to seek litter abatement orders only as a last resort. In most cases, we envisage that the litter or refuse which is the subject of the complaint would be removed without the need for action in the courts. Similarly, we expect local authorities to use their powers to serve litter abatement notices only where persuasion to clear the litter or refuse in question has failed.

City Challenge

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will set out the basis for selection of the local authorities to be invited to submit bids in the second round of city challenge and the criteria he will use to assess the bids submitted.

Mr. Portillo: Our present intention is that those authorities which currently have urban programme status will be eligible to participate in the second round of city challenge. We shall draw on the experience gained in this year's pacemaker exercise to determine the criteria for assessing the bids in the second round.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will provide details of the sources of funding for the city challenge scheme in subsequent years and set out the impact of these funding arrangements on the existing urban programme administered through local authorities, as a whole, and on the individual allocations of local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: No decisions have yet been taken about the extent and timing of future competitions, beyond the present intention to hold a further competition in 1992 and so to distribute more of the Government's resources for inner cities on a competitive basis.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to increase the number of inspectors within the planning inspectorate.

Mr. Yeo: Yes. We are currently taking on an additional 45 planning inspectors to deal with forecast workload in the coming years.

Satellite Dishes

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when revised permitted development rights for the installation of satellite dishes will come into force.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales have today laid before the House the Town and Country Planning General Development (Amendment) Order 1991. This order will come into force on 31 July. It will:

(a) introduce stricter permitted development rights for the installation, alternation and replacement of satellite dishes;

(b) allow factory/warehouse extensions built as permitted development to be used for social or welfare purposes for employees, including creche facilities for their children;

(c) introduce permitted development rights to enable licensed operators of driver information systems to instal the necessary equipment, subject to size limitations; and

(d) include a statement of property owners'/agricultural tenants' rights on the certificates which an applicant for planning permission is required to serve on those who own or have an interest in land for which the application is made.

My right hon. Friends have also made the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) Order 1991, which places dry-cleaning establishments, but not launderettes, in the shops use class (A1) of the order. This order will also come into force on 31 July.

WALES

School Buildings Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give, in 1990 prices, by local education authority, the level of capital spending on school buildings for each of the financial years since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is given in the following table. Figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

Capital expenditure on schools at 1990-91 prices[1]

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Clwyd	5·7	6·8	6·1	5·0	4·6	4·6	5·1	5·8	6·4	5·0	5·0
Dyfed	3·0	4·2	4·2	5·4	5·8	4·2	3·3	4·4	6·5	5·5	3·0
Gwent	7·5	7·9	4·7	5·8	6·9	6·4	6·3	5·9	6·9	7·5	6·6
Gwynedd	2·0	3·6	2·5	1·7	1·7	1·7	2·3	2·0	2·6	2·5	1·9
Mid Glamorgan	7·1	7·9	9·0	8·2	8·2	7·3	3·9	5·5	7·3	6·7	6·6
Powys	1·3	1·8	2·2	2·5	2·3	1·5	0·6	2·5	2·1	1·3	1·5
South Glamorgan	3·7	3·7	2·3	3·4	2·0	2·8	1·9	2·8	2·3	4·2	5·3
West Glamorgan	3·2	7·2	6·0	6·1	4·2	3·1	4·3	4·8	5·8	5·7	6·4
Total Wales	33·6	43·2	36·8	38·2	35·8	31·6	27·6	33·8	40·0	38·3	36·4

[1] Includes expenditure on acquisition of land, existing buildings, new construction and works excludes expenditure on plant machinery and equipment. The GDP deflator has been used to reprice to 1990-91.

Oral Health

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what incentives his Department employs to encourage everyone to visit a dental practitioner every six months.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The frequency of examination appropriate for maintaining oral health will vary from individual to individual depending on clinical circumstances. Both the new continuing care arrangements for adult patients and the capitation arrangements for child patients allow dentists the flexibility to give specific advice to patients to accommodate individual clinical needs.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance his Department has issued to schools in Wales regarding the effect of milk consumption on oral health.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. However, general nutritional advice is issued by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many health authorities in Wales currently provide dental screening for *(a)* all pre-schools playgroup children, *(b)* primary and junior school children twice a year and *(c)* secondary school children annually.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally. However, district health authorities are required by WHC(89)28 to arrange and provide adequate resources to undertake the screening of the teeth of children in state-funded schools at least three times in each child's school life. In areas of poor dental health and where availability of general dental services is poor, such screening may need to be more frequent—where necessary, annually.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of funding his Department is making available in the current financial year for research into ways of improving the oral health of Welsh children and adults.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: During the financial year the Department has made available a total of £89,000 specifically for research into oral health in Wales. In addition, all district health authorities are currently funding oral screening and epidemiological studies.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to add fluoride to potable water supplies in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None.

The 1985 Water (Fluoridation) Act provides for fluoridation of water supplies at the request of health authorities after a thorough publicity and consultation process. The Government believe it to be right that decisions should continue to be taken, as they have over

the past 30 years, at a local rather than national level. In the final analysis it is the task of the district health authority to determine the benefit.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of the British Dental Association.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As Minister with responsibility for health matters in the Principality I met representatives of the British Dental Associations General Dental Services Committee for Wales on 24 May. In addition, our officials are in regular touch with BDA representatives in Wales. The BDA also participates in the Welsh Dental Committee, which is the statutory advisory committee to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the information that his Department holds on the epidemiology of the dental health needs of children and adults in Wales both on an all-Wales basis and on specific geographical areas within Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The latest available data on adult dental health, prepared from surveys carried out by OPCS on behalf of the Health Departments, are published by HMSO in the document "Adult Dental Health 1988 United Kingdom." Annual reports on child dental health are published in the journal "Community Dental Health": the latest results appeared in vol. 8, No. 2, July 1991. These studies are co-ordinated by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry and are carried out by the staff of district health authorities' community dental services as part of their responsibility under circular WHC(89)28.

Standardised small district data are not held centrally. However, data are held by DHAs for assessing local health needs and it is intended that these should be published by districts as part of the report by their director of dental public health. The first reports are due to be prepared by September 1991 to inform the annual review meetings of each DHA.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each health authority in each of the past four years the funding for oral surgery that his Department has undertaken as part of the waiting list initiative.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is given in the following table:

District health authority	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
Clwyd	—	—	1,240	—
Gwynedd	6,500	13,880	16,600	—
Mid Glamorgan	11,400	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	—	—	7,300	—
TOTAL	17,900	13,880	25,150	—

No other health authority has received funding under the waiting times initiative for oral surgery in the last four years.

HIV

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance his Department has issued to dental practitioners regarding the treatment of patients infected with HIV hepatitis B.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows:

CDO(86)3 drew the attention of dental practitioners to AIDS booklet 3 "Guidance for Surgeons, Anaesthetists, Dentists and Teams".

CDO(88)1 "Cross infection control".

HP 119/34/2 (1988). "AIDS infected health workers: report by the expert advisory group".

WHC(88)38 "AIDS Control (ACT) 1987" instruction to report on staff training regarding AIDS.

"Guidance for Clinical Health Care Workers: Protection Against Infection with HIV and Hepatitis Viruses", Issued January 1990 (issued under PSM(9)3).

Sports Fields

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the number of acres of school sports fields that have been sold by local education authorities since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The provision of adequate land to meet the needs of schools is the responsibility of local education authorities. Information about disposals of school sports fields by these authorities is not held centrally.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *55-6*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each publicity campaign.

Mr. David Hunt: The 1991-92 Enterprise Wales and road safety campaigns started in April 1991 and will continue until March 1992.

Drug and alcohol misuse publicity is planned to commence in October 1991. A completion date for this activity has not yet been determined.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers of *(a)* nursery and primary schools, *(b)* middle schools and *(c)* secondary schools by size, according to the group sizes defined in the school teachers' pay and conditions document.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* The information as at January 1991 is given in the following table. There are no middle schools in Wales.

Group sizes	*Nursery and primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1	935	—
2	759	—
3	77	10
4	—	59
5	—	133
6	—	28

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the average numbers of teaching staff

in *(a)* nursery and primary schools, *(b)* middle schools and *(c)* secondary schools for each size of school, according to the group sizes defined in the school teachers' pay and conditions document.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* The information in respect of the average number of full-time qualified teachers as at January 1991 is given in the following table. There are no middle schools in Wales.

Group sizes	*Nursery and primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1	4	—
2	9	—
3	16	23
4	—	37
5	—	54
6	—	78

PRIME MINISTER

Pension Age

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the President of the European Commission regarding the Barber judgment and the extent to which retrospection will be limited when the judgment is applied; and if he will place a copy of his letter in the Library.

The Prime Minister: I have written to President Delors twice on this matter; first to express my concern about the financial and economic implications of the European Court of Justice's judgment in the Barber case; and then to inform him about the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on 26 June at columns 997-1006.

The extent of the retrospective effect of the judgment is one of the aspects on which clarification is being sought from the European Court. We shall argue before the court that the judgment does not apply to benefits based on service before the date of the judgment.

It is not my usual practice to publish correspondence of this kind.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many, and what percentage of men aged 60, 61, 62, 63, 64 and 65 years are not in regular employment.

Mr. Jackson: Estimates from the 1990 Labour Force Survey are shown in the following table:

Men not in employment—Great Britain

Age	*Numbers (thousands)*	*Per cent.*
60	111	40·7
61	123	46·2
62	124	48·4
63	154	55·1
64	169	62·6
65	210	82·0

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 72, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each publicity campaign.

Mr. Jackson *[pursuant to his answer, 1 July 1991, Official Report, column 72]:* Press advertising for career development loans is planned to start in late July and run until September. Press advertising for the national training awards winners announcement is due to start on November 30 and to run for one week.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the last annual report for each agency in his Department was published; and when the next ones are due;

(2) what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each agency in his Department; and what is the length of their contracts;

(3) if he will list the new forms of working patterns introduced into each agency in his Department since its establishment; and if he will break down by grade the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern;

(4) how many staff were in post on the date that each agency in his Department was established; and how many staff are in post now;

(5) whether any appointments from the private sector have been made to any agency in his Department at grade 7 or above since its establishment;

(6) what is the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each agency in his Department; and from which institution;

(7) if he will list those facilities for staff which have been introduced in each agency in his Department since its establishment;

(8) if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each agency in his Department since its establishment; and if he will identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status;

(9) whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in any agency in his Department;

(10) how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each agency in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The chief executives of our agencies—the Passport Agency and the Forensic Science Service—will be writing to the hon. Member about this. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Dog Attacks

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of attacks on people by dogs have been recorded by the Metropolitan police in Tower Hamlets in each year since 1979.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Metropolitan police have kept records of incidents involving dangerous dogs only since November 1989, but there are no figures relating solely to Tower Hamlets. However, I am informed that, in the force area which includes Tower Hamlets, 38 incidents involving dogs have been noted since records began.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *4*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each advertising campaign.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Officials are working on proposals for the next crime prevention and fire safety television advertising campaigns. Timing and duration will depend on our assessment of what time of year offers the best value for money.

Plans for non-television advertising publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 are as follows:

Campaign	*Start date*	*Duration*
ELECTORAL REGISTRATION		
General Registration	Mid September 1991	Approximately 1 month
Absent Voting	When a general election is mounted	2-3 days
CIVIL PROTECTION MAGAZINE	Every quarter	Throughout the year
POLICE RECRUITMENT		
Graduate	1 September 1991	4 months
Ethnic	1 April 1991—Continuation from campaign which started in March 1991.	3 weeks
POLICE		
Special Constables Recruitment:		
Tactical	31 July 1991	3 months—11 selected force areas—Part of a month per force.
Awareness	1 April 1991—Continuation from campaign which started in January 1991. There is a range of print material available both during the Campaign periods and throughout the year.	1 month—Post campaign research will determine whether further advertising will be required in this financial year but this will not take place before November 1991.
Crime Prevention	1 April 1991	This comprises a range of publicity material that is generally available year-round.
Fire Prevention and Safety	1 April 1991	A full range of publicity material is available all year-round.
Fire Safety Week	14 October 1991	5 days—Specific print material will be made available in support of National Fire Safety Week.
Passports	September/October	Not confirmed.
Prison Service Recruitment	Autumn	Up to 3 months.

I will take this opportunity to correct an error in the table covering non-television publicity campaigns in the answer of 1 July at column *4*. The figure for fire prevention and safety should be £1,064,000 and not £2,064,000. The other £1 million is accounted for by the television fire safety advertising mentioned above the table.

Emergency Planning Review

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the review of emergency planning which was announced on 16 October 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My predecessor said in his statement on 16 October last year that he had received a report from Mr. David Brook, his civil emergencies adviser, on the role of local authorities in peacetime emergencies; and that he would be considering the report in conjunction with a review of the options for the future of our civil defence arrangements in the light of developments in east-west relations. This would enable us to consider whether a more coherent approach to emergency planning for the protection of the public in both peace and war could be achieved.

The Government's commitment to civil defence remains firm. For our civil defence arrangements to continue to be relevant and effective the planning assumptions on which they are based must reflect the realities of international relations. Current civil defence planning concentrates on the effects of a major nuclear attack on the United Kingdom. The Government have decided that in future such civil defence plans should be maintained in such a state that they could be brought to full readiness within a period of three months. Essential plans should be capable of being put into effect within seven days. These assumptions will be kept under regular review.

This change has to be viewed in the wider context of an international situation that remains troubled and far from risk-free. With the now reduced risk of nuclear conflict the Government believe that the time is right to develop more flexible civil defence arrangements. This approach will require a closer correlation between contingency plans for civil defence and peacetime emergencies.

In his report Mr. Brook, the civil emergencies adviser, points to a number of shortcomings in local authority arrangements for dealing with peacetime disasters. Some local authorities are effective in their planning; others less so. Mr. Brook has identified particular problems of inadequate planning and co-ordination in some metropolitan areas. He has recommended to me that there should be new legislation on civil protection which would include a statutory duty on local authorities to plan, train and exercise for their role in mitigating the effects of peacetime disasters.

I am placing a summary of Mr. Brook's report in the Library.

It is clearly unacceptable that some local authorities should be inadequately prepared to deal with a major peacetime emergency and I agree with Mr. Brook that the shortcomings that he has identified must be rectified. However, while I do not rule out the possibility of legislation in the longer term, there are obvious difficulties in introducing legislation affecting the duties of local authorities at a time when local government reorganisation is in prospect. I propose therefore to seek improvements in peacetime planning in the first instance by measures which are open to me under existing legislation. These changes will also bear positively on our arrangements for civil defence.

It is against this background that I have taken the following decisions.

I will seek to achieve improvements in local authority planning for emergencies in peace and war through a package of measures. These will include the issue of central guidance on the handling of peacetime emergencies; a review of the organisation of emergency planning within metropolitan areas; and a more flexible use of civil defence grant for local authorities to ensure a more broadly based planning. Mr. Brook already has the first of these measures in hand. On the second I will be asking officials to consider how arrangements in metropolitan areas can be improved within the existing statutory framework. The aim would be to involve the metropolitan districts and London boroughs in the planning process more than is sometimes the case at present.

Local authority civil defence planning will in future be based on the more flexible approach I have already described. Its aims will be to ensure that all local authorities are able to continue to deliver the services for which they are responsible in peacetime in a wide range of possible civil defence emergencies. It will therefore be more relevant to peacetime disasters. I also propose to encourage local authorities to take full advantage of the provisions in existing legislation which permits the use of civil defence resources to carry out planning for peacetime disasters, provided that the Home Office is satisfied that they are making reasonable progress with civil defence planning.

This approach should secure better value for money from civil defence grant to local authorities and, provided that this is forthcoming, I shall give a measure of protection to the grant within what will inevitably be a diminishing total expenditure on civil defence. But I shall expect local authorities to continue to make a contribution to emergency planning from their own resources; and I will be ready to withhold grant from any local authority which is inefficient in its use of grant or seeks to evade its civil defence responsibilities.

A new system will be developed to monitor the changes in local authority planning, for which new objectives will be set. Local authorites will be given guidance in due course.

I have concluded that while there is a continuing need for protected local authority emergency centres, the existing requirement for two such emergency centres in each county and one in each district is no longer realistic. I therefore intend to set a new minimum requirement of one protected centre per county. I shall give further consideration, in consultation with local authorities, to the future of existing protected centres above this new minimum.

The new civil defence planning assumptions, and the more flexible approach to civil defence which I wish to see developed, will require the further development of the emergency communications network. I am now prepared to extend the network to district council offices and to county council offices in those places where the protected emergency centre is remotely located. The rate at which this can be achieved will depend on the availability of resources.

I have also looked at the role of the United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation, including the Royal Observer Corps, taking into account changing civil defence requirements. I have decided that the arrangements for monitoring details of nuclear bursts and radioactive fall-out in wartime must be restructured. Certain of UKWMO's functions in this area will be carried out by central Government and integrated with existing local authority plans and responsibilities for monitoring in the field. We will be discussing with local authorities the implementation of these proposals.

I have therefore concluded with regret that the Home Office can no longer justify the continued use of the ROC and Home Department volunteers for the monitoring task.

It has therefore been decided, following consultations between the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence, who share responsibilities for the ROC, that the Corps will be stood down in its operational role.

I must take this opportunity to pay tribute to the loyal and dedicated service the full-time officers and volunteers of the ROC have given over 36 years. The considerable time and effort invested by the members of the Corps is a measure of their commitment and professionalism. I should also recognise the dedication and hard work of the Home Office volunteers who have been involved in monitoring. I did not take lightly the decision to dispense with their, nor the ROC's, services. I am aware that they have all earned our gratitude and respect.

My officials are currently reviewing the arrangements for warning taking into account possible peacetime needs and costs. I hope to make a further announcement soon.

Since more time will be available in future to activate civil defence plans the level of day-to-day police and fire service war planning can be reduced. Preliminary discussions have already been held with the relevant police and fire service committees to work out how this is best achieved.

These new arrangements will provide a major opportunity to improve arrangements for the protection of the public in peace and war. They will be developed by my Department in full consultation with those responsible for putting them into effect within the broad framework that I have set out in this statement.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing and Community Charge Benefits

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing, with columns for English regions and England, Scotland, Wales and

Northern Ireland an analysis of those elements of table 2 of Cm 1514 which are included within the housing and community charge benefits totals in table 3 of Cm 1514.

Miss Widdecombe: Figures in Cm 1514 relate to Great Britain; information concerning Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

All benefit elements of table 2 of Cm 1514 are included within the housing and community charge benefit totals in table 3 of Cm 1514, and the administration elements of table 2 are included in the grand total of social security spending line of table 3. Information about English regions could be obtained only at disproportionate cost; the requested information for England, Scotland and Wales is in the table.

£ million

	1985-86 outturn	*1986-87 outturn*	*1987-88 outturn*	*1988-89 outturn*	*1989-90 outturn*	*1990-91 estimated outturn*
Rent rebates:						
England	1,864	1,940	1,986	2,137	2,265	2,561
Scotland	225	258	291	313	349	383
Wales	127	134	134	148	155	152
Rent rebates discretionary:						
England	11	11	15	4	11	10
Scotland	4	5	5	1	1	2
Wales	1	1	1	0	0	0
Rent allowances:						
England	781	875	888	911	1,089	1,389
Scotland	55	71	89	85	104	142
Wales	40	49	48	53	59	74
Rent allowances discretionary:						
England	3	3	4	1	5	4
Scotland	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing benefit local authority administration:						
England	136	154	193	216	233	179
Scotland	13	14	19	17	20	14
Wales	6	7	9	8	8	8
Community charge benefit local authority administration:						
England	—	—	—	—	—	139
Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	11
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	6
Other:						
England	—	—	—	4	3	—
Scotland	—	—	—	3	1	—
Wales	—	—	—	0	0	—
Total local authority expenditure	3,268	3,521	3,682	3,902	4,304	5,076

Note: Figures may not sum to Cm 1514 Table 2 totals due to rounding.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table reconciling for the years 1985-86 to 1990-91 the figures for England, Scotland and Wales for housing and community charge benefits, as given in table 3 of Cm 1514, with those for housing benefits, as given in the *Official Report*, 28 March, column *516*.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to publish such a table because the information given in column *516* of the *Official Report* for 28 March was taken from the 1989 public expenditure White Paper (Cm 621), and is based on local authority returns which are subject to adjustment. The information given in table 3 of the departmental report (Cm 1514) is more recent and therefore includes subsequent adjustments.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, with columns for English regions and England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland an analysis of social security expenditure consistent with table 3 of Cm 1514.

Miss Widdecombe: Figures in Cm 1514 relate to Great Britain; information concerning Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The information requested is not available except for housing benefit (transitional payments excepted) and community charge benefit. For rate rebate and community charge benefit I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 3 June 1991 at columns *113-14*. The information for rent rebates and rent allowances is set out in the table.

£ million

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Rent rebates in new towns:									
England	27	28	27	27	25	19	20	21	23

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Scotland	34	43	47	50	50	53	58	61	64
Wales	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Other rent rebates:									
England	1,875	1,951	2,001	2,140	2,276	2,571	2,816	3,011	3,192
Scotland	229	263	296	315	351	385	438	463	482
Wales	128	134	135	148	155	152	195	209	217
Rent allowances:									
England	784	877	891	913	1,094	1,393	1,540	1,732	1,942
Scotland	56	72	89	85	105	143	128	144	161
Wales	40	49	49	53	59	74	83	94	105

Note: Figures may not sum to Cm 1514 table 3 totals due to rounding.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when the last annual report for the Resettlement Agency was published; and when the next one is due;

(2) when the last annual report for the Information Technology Services Agency was published; and when the next one is due;

(3) when the last annual report for the Benefits Agency was published; and when the next one is due;

(4) when the last annual report for the Contributions Agency was published; and when the next one is due.

Miss Widdecombe: The chief executive of each of the Department's executive agencies will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each agency in his Department since its establishment as an executive agency; and if he will identify separately those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Miss Widdecombe: The targets set for the Department's four executive agencies—the Benefits Agency, Contributions Agency, Information Technology Services Agency and Resettlement Agency—are set out in each agency's business plan, copies of which are in the Library.

We have for some time set quality of service targets covering many aspects of the service that we provide for our customers. Since their establishment, a new customer satisfaction target has been set for the Benefits Agency, and the Contributions Agency has been set new targets for the registration of personal pension applications and for the handling of inquiries from employers and contributors and about personal pensions.

Family Credit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are refused family credit because at the time of their claim they are receiving statutory sick pay and are therefore not deemed to be undertaking remunerative work.

Mr. Jack: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that during the quarter to the end of June 1991 18,057 claims for family credit were disallowed on the grounds that no member of the family was engaged in remunerative work. Separate information is not available as to how many of those were cases where people were receiving statutory sick pay.

Attendance Allowance Unit, Blackpool

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will take steps to ensure that his Department's attendance allowance unit, North Fylde Central office, Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3TA, responds with expedition to correspondence from members of the public; and if he will ensure that an acknowledgement card is sent at an early date;

(2) what is the average wait a member of the general public experiences before a reply is received from the attendance allowance unit, Department of Social Security, North Fylde central office, Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3TA.

Mr. Scott: The administration of attendance allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information office.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what regulations govern the payment of family credit to families where the breadwinner is receiving statutory sick pay.

Mr. Jack: The relevant regulations arise out of the basic qualifying condition for family credit in section 20(5)(b) of the Social Security Act 1986 that a person must be "engaged and normally engaged in remunerative work". The circumstances in which a person is or is not to be treated as engaged or normally engaged in remunerative work are prescribed in the Family Credit (General) Regulations 1987, as amended, including the requirement in regulation 5(1) that a person shall be treated as engaged in remunerative work only if he carries out activities in the course of his work for not less than 24 hours in the week of the claim or in either of the two weeks immediately preceding the week of the claim, and he is employed at the date of the claim.

Section 20(6) of the Act provides that family credit awards last for 26 weeks and are unaffected by changes of circumstances during that period, so that if a person who is already receiving family credit becomes sick, his award will continue unchanged to the end of the 26-week period irrespective of whether statutory sick pay becomes payable.

Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what other benefits families unable to claim family credit because the breadwinner is off work sick are able to claim.

Mr. Jack: Employees who are off work sick may be entitled to statutory sick pay from their employer. If there is no entitlement to SSP, or title has run out, sickness/invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance, including dependency additions where appropriate, may be claimed. Subject to the family's circumstances, there may also be entitlement to income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Income Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support in each Newcastle social security office have arrangements for (1) direct payment of housing costs, (2) attachment of community charge, (3) direct re-payments to the social fund, (4) direct payments to the electricity companies and (5) direct payments to British Gas.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Social Fund

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements exist to ensure that items for which social fund loans or grants have been made are not subject to distraint by bailiffs seeking community charge arrears.

Mr. Scott: After they have obtained a court order to recover arrears, local authorities may ask the Department to make deductions from income support, which most social fund applicants receive. Distraint is one of the other options available to local authorities, and bailiffs will be guided by the general law on distraint.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been received from members of the public in respect of the low-level aerobatic display performed by a Tornado F-3 aircraft at Royal Air Force Leeming on 26 June.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: One.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of complaints received from members of the public within a 25 mile radius of Royal Air Force Leeming since Tornado squadrons have been stationed by year since 1988 to the latest date he has available for the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Central records are not maintained in a form that would enable the information sought to be provided.

Service Men (Executions)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and locations of each execution of British service men since 1961, with the offence in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No British service men have been executed since 1961.

Aerobatic Display, Whitby Regatta

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that the Royal Air Force Red Arrows aerobatic team should provide a display for the regatta in Whitby, North Yorkshire as a duty engagement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Requests for displays by the Red Arrows are considered on an annual basis. The Red Arrows are scheduled to appear at the Whitby regatta on 10 August 1991, but no commitments can be made regarding future years.

Injured Grenadiers

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated present value equivalent award of the sum he gave to the House in the Adjournment debate on 3 June, *Official Report*, column 136, assuming death occurs at age 25, 35, 45 and 55 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The estimated present value equivalent awards would be as follows:

	£
Death occurring at age 25	17,700
Death occurring at age 35	73,000
Death occurring at age 45	110,000
Death occurring at age 55	134,000

Anglo-French Co-operation (Training)

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military service personnel are studying in French defence colleges; and how many French military service personnel are studying in British defence colleges.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This year four British service personnel and four French service personnel are attending courses at defence colleges in France and the United Kingdom respectively.

ASLP Missile System

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department is having with the French Defence Ministry about the development of the ASLP missile system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are studying both United States and French systems as possible replacements for the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb. The ASLP missile is being considered in this context, and we are maintaining contact with the French Ministry of Defence as necessary.

RAF Boxer Network

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the total cost of the RAF Boxer network.

Mr. Alan Clark: The estimated cost of the RAF Boxer network, including all associated works services, is £230 million at 1991 economic conditions.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to how many local planning authorities he has

submitted notices of proposed development in respect of the Boxer network; and if he will publish a list of those authorities.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has submitted notices of proposed development to 92 local planning authorities in respect of the Boxer network. I am unable to provide a list of these authorities for the reasons I gave to my hon. Friend in my reply of 12 June 1991, *Official Report*, column *606-7*.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *82*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each publicity campaign.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Royal Navy

Production of a television recruiting advertisement and television advertising campaign—planned for four weeks in September-October 1991.

Army

Television recruiting campaign—24 June to 15 July 1991.
Cinema recruiting campaign—3 August to mid-October 1991.
Press campaign in support of above—mid July for two months.

Territorial Army

Combined TV-Press recruiting campaign highlighting the range of week-end activities in the Territorial Army—four weeks in October 1991 and in February 1992.
A press campaign to recruit specialist personnel—four weeks in October 1991 and in February 1992.

Tri-service

Press campaign to thank employers for releasing Volunteer Reserve Forces personnel during the Gulf crisis—18-23 June 1991.
Campaign to increase public awareness of Volunteer Reserve Forces and employers' support for them—four weeks in November-December 1991.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to establish further city technology colleges in Stockton, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans for the establishment of further city technology colleges in Stockton, Middlesbrough or Hartlepool. However, he would be willing to consider such proposals on their merits. In the meantime Macmillan college Teesside provides an excellent example of the benefits of a CTC education for pupils in Cleveland.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will consider alternative methods by which schools applying for grant-maintained status may become city technology colleges.

Mr. Eggar: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 3 July, we intend to create a new kind of school by enabling existing LEA-maintained and grant-maintained schools to apply to become grant-maintained technology schools and colleges. These will incorporate the key characteristics of city technology colleges. They will focus on technology in relation to any area of the curriculum and receive financial support from private sector sponsors.

Territorial Officials

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of territorial officers in his Department, together with their location, grades, the territories they cover and their total cost; and if he will make a statement on their duties.

Mr. Eggar: A total of 189 officers in the Department from grade 7 downwards have duties organised wholly or partly on a territorial basis. Their duties vary with the nature of the post, but broadly consist of liaison on a range of matters with a number of authorities or institutions in a specific geographical area. The estimated total cost is £3,250,000 per annum.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of local education authorities which are operating policies of minimal statementing with regard to pupils who may have special educational needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: We have no evidence that local education authorities are operating policies of minimal statementing irrespective of the needs of individual children. Where a child's needs are so assessed and the outcome of that assessment leads the local education authority to conclude that they should determine the special educational provision to be made for him they must make a statement of his special educational needs.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether any action has been taken against any local education authority with regard to its implementation of those parts of the Education Act 1981 which refer to children with special needs.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend receives appeals under sections 5(6) and 8(6) of the Education Act 1981 and complaints under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944 in relation to the discharge by local education authorities of their duties under the Education Act 1981. He has powers of direction under both Acts which he uses in appropriate cases.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many complaints under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944 he has received since 1 April 1983 in respect of local education authorities refusing to undertake assessments of children's needs under section 5 of the Education Act 1981; and in how many cases he has found in the complainant's favour and instructed the local education authority to undertake formal assessment.

Mr. Fallon: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many complaints under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944 and appeals under section 8 of the Education Act 1981 he has received since 1 April 1983 in relation to local education authorities' failure to

specify in sufficient detail the provision to be made under section 3 of a statement to meet a child's special educational needs; and in how many of these cases he has instructed local education authorities to redraft the relevant section 3.

Mr. Fallon: Between April 1983 and December 1990 there have been 246 appeals in England under section 8(6) of the Education Act 1981. Decisions have been reached in 168 cases. In 44 of these cases the Secretary of State has amended the special educational provision specified in the child's statement.

Information about the number of complaints received under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many appeals he has received in each year since 1983 relating to section 5(6) of the Education Act 1981 against a local education authority's decision not to issue a statement of special educational needs; and in how many of these cases he has upheld the parents' appeal and instructed a local education authority to issue a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Between April 1983 and December 1990 there have been 259 appeals in England under section 5(6) of the Education Act 1981. The following table lists by year the number of appeals received and the number of cases where the Secretary of State directed the local education authority to reconsider its decision not to issue a statement of special educational needs.

Year	*Appeals received*	*LEA directed to reconsider*
1983	4	1
1984	19	0
1985	21	0
1986	28	3
1987	36	2
1988	37	6
1989	50	2
1990	64	12

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what he treats as learning difficulty as set out in legislation; and what he treats as special educational needs which can be met from provision ordinarily available in schools.

Mr. Fallon: The term learning difficulty is defined in the Education Act 1981. A child has a learning difficulty if he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his age; or he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools, within the area of the local authority concerned, for children of his age; or he is under the age of five years and is, or would be if special educational provision were not made for him, likely to have learning difficulties as just described when over that age.

It is for individual local education authorities to decide which special educational needs can be met from provision ordinarily available in their schools.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what advice his Department gives on the role of parents in contributing to and challenging the outcome of non-statutory assessment procedures for children's special educational needs;

(2) what guidance he gives on the form of non-statutory assessment of children with special needs for whom section 5 assessment is not thought appropriate.

Mr. Fallon: The procedures for non-statutory assessments, including arrangements for the involvement of parents, are the responsibility of local education authorities. The Department is currently funding a project called "Partnership in Assessment". The project is being undertaken by the Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children and is intended to identify good practice for parental involvement in the assessment of children with special educational needs.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the schools in which observations of work with pupils with statements of special educational need formed the basis of the comment which accompanies the table in annexe A of his Department's circular No. 11/90.

Mr. Fallon: The table at annexe A of DES circular 11/90 is derived from observations made by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools of classroom work which they saw as promoting effective learning and care for various groups of pupils. Account was taken of group size, availability of staff and to some extent the total intensity of demand made upon staff by the group as a whole. These observations were gathered from many school inspections carried out over a number of years.

Court Judgments

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the criteria on which his Department decides which court judgments to publicise via the circulation of letters to chief education officers.

Mr. Fallon: Letters relating to court judgments are sent to chief education officers in cases where there are important implications for local education authorities' future practice.

National Curriculum

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to prevent the language in the national curriculum report from being used in teacher-training and other educational establishments.

Mr. Eggar: Language in the national curriculum materials should be used only in the context of in-service training programmes, where materials can be discussed and challenged. They were not designed for and are not for use in the classroom.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the principal authors and institutions with which his Department contracted in respect of the language in the national curriculum project and report, together with the sums paid to each.

Mr. Eggar: The Department's contract for the production of the training materials and the central co-ordination of the training programme was placed with the university of Nottingham, at a cost of some £120,000. The project is under the direction of Professor Ronald Carter, who took full editorial responsibility for the training package.

The LINC project itself included a central Government grant to support LEA expenditure of £21 million over three years. These funds were provided under the education support grant programme to assist the introduction of the national curriculum.

1991 Public Expenditure Survey

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will publish the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils relating to the 1991 public expenditure survey;

(2) whether he has received the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils relating to the 1991 public expenditure survey; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations he has received from the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils concerning publication of the board's advice relating to the 1991 public expenditure survey.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend received the Advisory Board for the Research Council's advice on this year's public expenditure survey on 8 May. He intends, as last year, to treat the advice on a confidential basis, in common with the corresponding advice which he receives from the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. He has received no representations from the chairman of the ABRC about publication of the board's advice on the 1991 survey.

Contracts (Quality Requirements)

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department inserts quality requirements into contracts awarded to academic institutions which would enable him to recover moneys spent on inadequate work.

Mr. Eggar: The Department uses a standard form of contract for education research projects which includes appropriate forms of protection for its interests and the use of the taxpayer's money. These include the specification of the work to be performed and its timing; provisions for inspection and steering of the work; control over the product of the study; and arrangements for early termination when needed. Payments are usually made in arrears depending on progress made.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *43-44*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each advertising campaign.

Mr. Eggar: The teacher recruitment campaign was launched on 1 July. Television advertising for this campaign will last for a period of three weeks and advertisements in the national press for four weeks. In addition, in the autumn, advertisements will appear in the national press for four weeks and in cinemas in slected towns during six alternating weeks. The exact dates for these have yet to be decided.

It is unlikely that the publicity campaign to provide parents with information about changes in the education system will include any paid advertising. The timing and duration of this campaign has yet to be decided.

The professional, industrial and commercial updating (PICKUP) programme does not involve advertising.

National Curriculum Council

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future organisation of the National Curriculum Council.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As the National Curriculum Council moves into the next phase of its work, I see advantage in separating the roles of chairman and chief executive. Mr. Duncan Graham has himself seen this stage of the process as a time for change and he will retire from the NCC with effect from 19 August. From that date I am appointing Mr. David Pascall as part-time chairman of the National Curriculum Council. The appointment will be for one year in the first instance, renewable thereafter. Mr. Pascall is manager of BP Exploration Control and Business Simplification Programmes. He has been a member of the council since August 1990. It will be for the council to appoint a full-time chief executive, with my approval, under the provisions of schedule 2 to the Education Reform Act 1988.

HEALTH

Discharge Arrangements

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken in monitoring the implementation of health circular 89/5 on discharge arrangements.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for regions to ensure that district health authorities implement the procedures for discharge set out in health circular 89(5), a copy of which is available in the Library. Action by special health authorities is being followed up by the Department through the quality control and business planning process.

Hospital Patients

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in hospitals by the national health service in 1961 and in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The method of collecting in-patient case statistics changed in 1988-89. Until that date statistics were collected on discharges and deaths from hospital. From 1988-89 they were collected as "finished consultant episodes" and included well babies who had formerly been excluded. The relevant figures are:

Cases treated in NHS hospitals

	Discharges and deaths	*Finished consultant episodes*
1961	4,035,000	—
1988-89	6,586,000	7,335,000
1989-90	—	7,477,000

AIDS

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to publish statistics on the spread of AIDS in inner cities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The spread of the human immunodeficiency virus which is the cause of AIDS can be

monitored through voluntary confidential reports on AIDS and HIV infection received by the Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centre. CDSC is currently analysing this by inner-city areas and such information should be available during the autumn of this year.

The first results from the anonymised HIV surveys, published on 17 May, indicated that the overall prevalence of HIV infection in women attending certain ante-natal clinics in inner London is one in 500. Among people attending certain sexually transmitted disease clinics in inner London prevalance is one in 500 among heterosexual women, one in 100 heterosexual men and one in five for homosexual-bisexual men. Further results will be published as they become available.

Life Expectancy

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current estimate for the life expectancy of males and females at birth for each district health authority; and what was the estimate for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tower Hamlets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths and discharges there were from national health service hospitals in Tower Hamlets with the principal diagnosis relating to alcohol for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list hospital and ward closures in Tower Hamlets for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. Richard Brew, the chairman of Tower Hamlets health authority, for details.

Senile Dementia

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district health authority in London the number of people suffering from senile dementia aged *(a)* up to 65 years of age, *(b)* 66 to 75 years, *(c)* 76 to 85 years and *(d)* over 86 years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Artificial Limbs

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued by his Department to district health authorities on their responsibility to provide artificial limbs and appliances for those people who need them.

Mr. Dorrell: Our planning guidance to health authorities over the last three years has drawn attention to these services as they transferred from central management to local control. We have emphasised the importance of maintaining them by ring-fencing their budget until April 1993. We also announced last week the setting up of an advisory group on rehabilitation: one of its tasks will be to monitor this area.

Hip Replacements

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip replacement operations have taken place since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table. The total does not include figures for 1987-88 as reliable data for this period are not available centrally. The figure for 1988-89 is estimated and may be revised following further analysis.

Estimated number of principal operations performed, ordinary admissions and day cases, NHS hospitals, England, 1979 to 1988-89

All patients total hip replacement and other arthroplasty of hip

	Number
1979	28,788
1980	31,660
1981	32,775
1982	33,171
1983	36,232
1984	36,926
1985	36,539
1986	41,000
1988-89	41,947
Total	319,038

NHS Trusts

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans exist for monitoring standards of care within national health service trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: District health authorities and fund-holding GPs, as purchasers of services, will set quality standards as part of their contracts with hospitals and other units, whether NHS trusts or directly managed units. Community health councils will continue to have access to trusts within their area of responsibility.

Continence Services

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the report of the review of continence services.

Mr. Dorrell: We have now received the report, "An Agenda for Action on Continence Services", and have placed copies in the Library. The report sets out information on the current state of continence services. It concludes that while there are examples of well-planned and co-ordinated local services, their availability is patchy. It identifies the key features of an effective local service and recommends that these should form the basis of planning and service delivery in all health districts and local authority areas in accordance with established departmental guidelines. It also recommends central action over the next few years to promote greater professional and public awareness of continence problems and the scope for tackling them, and to commission and disseminate the results of research to evaluate selected service patterns.

Copies of the report will be sent to health service managers and directors of social services with a letter emphasising the key messages for local service planning and provision.

We will take steps to implement the report's recommendations, for example—research on cost effectiveness and extending the training of nurses and other health professionals.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards establishing his Department's medicines control agency as an executive agency.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am pleased to announce that the Medicines Control Agency will be established as the second executive agency of the Department of Health on 11 July. The agency's role is to act on behalf of Ministers, the licensing authority, to safeguard public health by controlling medicines. It does this through a system of licensing, classification, monitoring and enforcement which ensures that medicines are of acceptable standards of safety, quality and efficacy. The agency's detailed aim, objectives and functions are set out in a framework document, copies of which will be placed in the Library. In accordance with next steps principles, the agency will be free to propose further adaptations to it if changing circumstances make this appropriate.

The chief executive has been set a number of key performance targets for 1991-92. These cover:

—standards of safety and quality;
—standards of service
—standards of financial control and efficiency.

A copy of the agency's business plan, in which the targets are detailed, will be placed in the Library.

Over the coming years, I will be setting the agency a range of performance targets to ensure that it continues to deliver improvements in the quality and efficiency of its work in the interests of the public health.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those district health authorities which currently provide an occupant-controlled powered outdoor wheelchair to disabled people who require one; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A pilot study in northern and north western regions during 1989-90 confirmed the obvious value of powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs for those able to benefit from them. We expect district health authorities, which have the responsibility for meeting the health needs of their populations, to extend their introduction wherever priorities allow. We do not collect the information centrally.

Dentistry

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from learned societies in dentistry and anaethesiology regarding the appropriateness of out-patient general anaesthesia in dental practice outside hospital; if he will place both the representations he has received and his response in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The 29 learned bodies listed in the table submitted comments on a report to the standing dental advisory committee by an expert working party in general anaesthesia, sedation and resuscitation in dentistry. The report recommended that, while the use of general anaesthesia should be avoided wherever possible, it should continue to be available outside hospitals, provided certain standards are maintained. This principle was generally endorsed by the learned bodies which commented, as were many of the detailed recommendations.

The report was issued as a consultation document. It is currently being considered in the light of the 138 responses received.

Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland.
British Dental Association.
BDA East Midland Branch.
BDA—Northern Ireland Office.
BDA Wessex Branch.
British Medical Association.
British Postgraduate Medical Foundation—Institute of Dental Surgery.
British Paedodontic Society.
British Society for Dentistry for the Handicapped.
College of Anaesthetists and Faculty of Dental Surgery.
Dental Sub-Committee of North West Regional Medical Committee.
General Dental Council.
General Dental Practioners' Association.
General Medical Council.
General Medical Services Committee.
Joint Consultants Committee.
King's College School of Medicine and Dentistry, King's College, London.
National Association of Administrative Dental Officers.
North Western Administrative Dental Officers Group.
Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham.
Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Department of Anaesthetics.
Society for the Advancement of Anaesthesia in Dentistry.
The Association of Dental Anaesthetists.
The Royal College of General Practitioners.
UMDS Guy's Hospital Dental School, Department of Orthodontics and Dentistry for Children.
University of Manchester, Turner Dental School.
University of Sheffield, Charles Clifford Dental Hospital.
University of Wales College of Medicine Dental School.
Wessex Region Postgraduate Dental Education Committee.

Duromine

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is satisfied with the safety of the drug Duromine; and what evidence he has of adverse short-term side effects among patients taking it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Following the introduction of licensing of medicinal products, the safety of Duromine, an established product, was reviewed and a reviewed product licence was issued in 1984. The licensed use is restricted to short-term administration as an adjunct to the treatment of moderate to severe obesity of some patients for whom close control and supervision should be provided. As the product is a prescription medicine, it would be used only after the prescriber had weighed the expected benefit against the possible risks to the particular patient. I am satisfied that the product, when used in accordance with the licensed particulars, should not expose the patient to an unacceptable level of risk.

Potentially, any drug may cause side-effects which may be minor or more serious. The established side-effects that are associated with a licensed medicinal product are detailed in the licence and are provided to prescribers in the data sheet distributed by the company marketing the product. The Committee on Safety of Medicines encourages prescribers to report serious adverse reactions which they suspect may have been due to an established drug and all reactions to new drugs. In the case of Duromine, there have been 61 reports of suspected adverse reactions since 1966; reactions are not classified into long and short-term effects. The report of an adverse reaction does not necessarily imply a causal effect. Information on adverse effects to Duromine is also to be found in published medical literature.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the specific assistance provided by his Department for people suffering from epilepsy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities have a duty to assess the health needs in their areas and to make provision. They provide a range of services for people with epilepsy; these are complemented by local authority social services. Responsibility for providing services rests with these local bodies rather than directly with the Department.

Trading Agencies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost, both capital and revenue, of moving the Northern regional health authority engineering design group trading agency to new premises.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for the Northern regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Peter Carr, the chairman of the Northern regional health authority, for details.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to health authorities covering the conflicts of interest both of organisations and individual staff where non-national health service agencies assume the management responsibility for national health service trading agencies; and whether these non-national health service agencies are subject to the scrutiny of the Audit Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: Management responsibility for national health service trading agencies rests with the national health service. Where officials have been seconded to NHS trading agencies from the private sector they are accountable to senior NHS management.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *54*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each publicity campaign.

Mr. Dorrell: Current phases of the publicity campaigns listed in my reply to the hon. Member of 1 July at column *54* began in April 1991 and are all ongoing with the exception of "The Health of the Nation" Green Paper campaign which will end by 31 October 1991.

Fluoridation

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) *Official Report*, 27 June, column *547*, for what reason Yorkshire Water ceased to supply fluoridated water on 31 October 1989.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 July 1991]:* Yorkshire Water informed Huddersfield district health authority on 18 April 1989 that it was withdrawing from the agreement to fluoridate water supplied by the Longwood and Holmbridge/Digley water treatment works because at the time agreement had not yet been reached with Government about the wording of a suitable guarantee/indemnity against any costs or liabilities which water undertakers might incur. Subsequently the water industry accepted the form of indemnity which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was empowered to provide under the Water Act 1989.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 July 1991

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table otherwise comparable to that provided in his answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, columns *184-85*, to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) showing reductions in payment per year in successive increments of £10 from £0 to £140 for (i) charge payers and (ii) pensioners.

Mr. Portillo The information requested is given in the table.

Reduction in payment per year Bottom of range (£)	*Charge payers (millions)*	*Pensioners (millions)*
0	1·1	0·1
10	2·5	1·2
20	4·7	2·6
30	1·0	0·2
40	0·9	0·2
50	1·1	0·2
60	1·7	0·3
70	1·6	0·2
80	1·4	0·2
90	1·5	0·3
100	1·2	0·2
110	1·0	0·1
120	0·8	0·1
130	0·8	0·1
140	14·2	1·9

Waste Incineration

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 2 July, how much of the special waste produced in the United Kingdom annually is disposed of by incineration.

Mr. Baldry: My Department's "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 13" published by HMSO in 1991 included in figure 5·3 an estimate that about 5 per cent. of the special waste produced in the United Kingdom in 1988 was disposed of by incineration. This figure is probably typical for any 12-month period in recent years.

Parish Election Expenses

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will issue regulations to effect the release of money held by district councils on account for parish councils to be used by them for parish election expenses.

Mr. Key: The treatment of any money held by district councils relating to balances on parish accounts is a matter for the authorities concerned.

Planning Inquiries

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on the lastest year's figures available for England and Wales what were the mean, median, longest and shortest lengths of time that were taken to make a decision about whether or not to issue a call-in notice under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, previously section 35 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, following an article 14 direction.

Mr. Yeo: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Planning Applications

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on the latest year's figures available for England and Wales, how many planning applications were subject to an article 14 direction; how many were subsequently the subject of a call-in under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, previously section 35 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, and what both these figures were as a percentage of the total number of planning applications submitted.

Mr. Yeo: In England in 190-91, a total of 182 article 14 directions were made; 70 planning applications were called in following such directions; a total of 532,000 planning applications were received by local planning authorities. In Wales in the same year, the corresponding figures were 13; 2; 39,000.

Planning applications which were the subject of article 14 directions or were called in by my right hon. Friends in 1990-91 were not necessarily received by local planning authorities in the same year.

Standard Spending Assessments

Sir Richard Luce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *587*, if he will set out in detail the formulae for the criteria which are required in assessing the standard spending assessment for a district council.

Mr. Portillo: The formulae for assessing the standard spending assessment for a district council are set out in paragraphs 3.33 to 3.36 and 3.48 to 3.58 of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) as amended by paragraph 9 of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England). Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Venezuelan Environment Minister

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he held an official meeting with Snr. Enrique C. Finol, Minister for the Environment for Venezuela, during his recent visit to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: A meeting was planned, but did not take place owing to a change in the Venezuelan Minister's programme.

Commonhold Legislation

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it is his intention to include a right to buy the freehold for existing long leaseholders in the forthcoming commonhold legislation.

Mr. Yeo: We hope to make a statement on commonhold very shortly.

Housing, Tower Hamlets

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average rent of local authority homes in the London borough of Tower Hamlets in 1978 and in each subsequent year.

Sir George Young: Information on average weekly unrebated rents in April of each year is published annually by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Housing Rents Statistics" for those authorities which respond to their annual survey. Copies of this publication for 1978 to 1990 are in the Library.

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new homes were started and completed in the London borough of Tower Hamlets in each year since 1974; and how many of these were local authority or housing association homes for rent.

Sir George Young: The London borough of Tower Hamlets has not sent the Department any statistical returns about housebuilding in the area since 1984. The available information as reported by the borough for 1980 onwards is shown in tables 1.1 to 1.5 of "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Areas 1980 to 1989". Tables 3.1 to 3.6 show housebuilding in Tower Hamlets by the Greater London council. Figures for 1974 to 1979 are shown in tables 5 and 7 of the following issues of "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales": volume numbers 33, 37, 41, 45, 49 and 53, respectively. No completions have been reported of dwellings built specifically for sale by local authority or housing associations in Tower Hamlets.

Copies of the above publications are in the Library.

Planning Procedures

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are taken to ensure that planning inspectors with interests in property development and building firms do not hear appeals concerning major development proposals.

Mr. Yeo: Inspectors are not allocated cases where it is clear that they have a personal involvement or interest that might bring into question their impartiality. If an inspector is allocated a case where he has a personal interest that could conflict with his official duty, he is required to inform the Department. Another inspector will then be appointed in his place.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what register of interests exists for planning inspectors.

Mr. Yeo: The Department does not keep a register of inspectors' interests. It does however, maintain a list of areas in which inspectors will not be allocated work. This list normally includes the local authority area in which an inspector lives, or has been recently employed, and any other area where he has interests that could conflict with his official duties.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *273-74*.

Mr. Heseltine: The following surveys carried out by my Department since 20 December 1990, include questions to individuals about their opinions:

Survey of Single Homelessness.
Survey of Housing Association Tenants.
Study of Under-Occupation in the Social Rented Sector.
Evaluation of the Impact of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987.
Study of Conversions of Houses into Flats in London.
Evaluating the Impact of Block Action.
Appraisal of assisted Agency Services.

Polish Economic Adviser

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he held an official meeting with Dr. Tomasz Zylicz, economics adviser to the Polish Minister for the Environment during his recent visit to London.

Mr. Trippier: No.

United Nations Environment Programme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he had an official meeting with Dr. Yusuf Ahmad of the United Nations environment programme executive directorate during his recent visit to London.

Mr. Trippier: Dr. Ahmad is a frequent visitor to the Department. My officials keep in touch with him on a number of international environmental issues on which he has much valued expertise.

International Biotechnology Workshop

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the international biotechnology workshop held at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre on 17-19 June.

Mr. Baldry: Further to my reply of 14 May to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the workshop was mounted under the auspices of the United Conference on Environment and Development—UNCED—and attended by some 50 senior international experts from about 30 countries. My Department contributed $80,000—£44,700—towards its cost.

Under the chairmanship of Dr. Nay Htun of the UNCED secretariat, the workshop considered a wide range of factors affecting the assessment and management of risks in biotechnology. The expert advice given will form the basis of proposals to be presented to the UNCED preparatory committee at its third session in Geneva next month.

The encouraging progress made at the workshop augurs well for the consideration of the environmentally sound management of biotechnology at the UNCED "Earth summit," to be held in Brazil in 1992. The United Kingdom will continue to work hard to prepare the ground for the agreement of a set of principles for risk assessment and management as a basis for the development of international guidelines on biotechnology safety.

Thorne Moor

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Thorne moor has been designated under the Ramsar convention.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* No. The former Nature Conservancy Council identified Thorne—and Hatfield—moor as a potential Ramsar site but the Government have not received any formal recommendations from English Nature.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he is considering for the storage of compressed carbon dioxide waste gases from coal gasification in depleted gas fields, as part of the programme for reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Moynihan: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Energy's Chief Scientist's Group at the Energy Technology Support Unit is evaluating, in collaboration with industry, a number of options for the recovery of carbon dioxide from fossil fuel combustion and, inter alia, its disposal in disused natural gas fields. My Department is also seeking collaboration, under International Energy Agency auspices, with up to 14 other countries in an assessment of the feasibility of removing, utilising, transporting and disposing of carbon dioxide produced in fossil fuel power generation.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table of the total grants given by each local authority social services department in England to voluntary organisations for the last year for which the information is available.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 July 1991]:* I have been asked to reply.

The latest year for which information is available is 1988-89. The information is given in the table.

Local Authority Contributions to Voluntary Organisations in 1988-89

	£000
Metropolitan Borough Councils	
Bolton	80
Bury	166
Manchester	0
Oldham	177
Rochdale	407
Salford	85
Stockport	101
Tameside	133
Trafford	0
Wigan	196
Knowsley	415
Liverpool	924
St. Helens	0
Sefton	25
Wirral	366
Barnsley	10
Doncaster	214
Rotherham	27
Sheffield	1,460
Gateshead	371
Newcastle	1,503
North Tyneside	19
South Tyneside	31
Sunderland	0
Birmingham	4,564
Coventry	805
Dudley	248
Sandwell	91
Solihull	0
Walsall	120
Wolverhampton	1,014
Bradford	725
Calderdale	164
Kirklees	497
Leeds	1,281
Wakefield[1]	
Inner London Boroughs	
City of London	212
Camden	2,216
Greenwich[1]	
Hackney[1]	
Hammersmith[1]	
Islington	3,278
Kensington	1,238
Lambeth[1]	
Lewisham	1,466
Southwark	1,839
Tower Hamlets	0
Wandsworth	266
Westminster	2,560
Outer London Boroughs	
Barking	0
Barnet	532
Bexley	310
Brent	2,244
Bromley	321
Croydon	0
Ealing	403
Enfield	72
Haringey[1]	
Harrow	57
Havering	25
Hillingdon	300
Hounslow	0
Kingston	298
Merton	0
Newham	462
Redbridge	2
Richmond	0
Sutton	245
Waltham Forest	0
Shire Counties	
Isles of Scilly	0
Bedfordshire	215
Berkshire	418
Buckinghamshire	1,510
Cambridgeshire	1,345
Cheshire	605
Cleveland	638
Cornwall	125
Cumbria	19
Derbyshire	945
Devon	924
Dorset	0
Durham	105
East Sussex	877
Essex	810
Gloucestershire	742
Hampshire	1,547
Hereford and Worcester	217
Hertfordshire	0
Humberside	0
Isle of Wight	48
Kent	1,268
Lancashire	490
Leicestershire	2,157
Lincolnshire	307

	£000
Norfolk	1,329
Northamptonshire	1,607
Northumberland	48
North Yorkshire	359
Nottinghamshire	1,889
Oxfordshire	555
Shropshire	74
Somerset[1]	—
Staffordshire	229
Suffolk	953
Surrey	55
Warwickshire	1,229
West Sussex	18
Wiltshire	1,311

Source: local authority revenue outturn forms 1988-89
[1] Completed form not received by 1 August 1990

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the Government of the People's Republic of China with regard to the detention of the Right Reverend Joseph Fan Zhongliang.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made no specific representations about the detention of Bishop Fan Zhongliang.

Conventional Forces in Europe

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in clarifying technical disputes regarding the CFE treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At an extraordinary conference of the CFE signatories in Vienna on 14 June, the Soviet Union made a statement regarding the treatment of equipment in coastal defence, naval infantry and strategic rocket force units. The extraordinary conference concluded that a satisfactory basis existed for proceeding toward ratification and implementation of the CFE treaty. The agreement reached will ensure that the Soviet Union will in practice comply with the limits, including zonal and active unit sublimits, established by the treaty.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *71*.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No further public opinion surveys have been carried out by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since my answer of 17 December 1990.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *24*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of the publicity campaign to which he refers.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The publicity campaign aimed at British travellers abroad is a continuous one.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *24*.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No such companies are employed or involved in these campaigns.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his most recent assessment of the dangers faced by the refugee Shias in southern Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are very disturbed by recent United Nations evidence of renewed Iraqi action against those Iraqi Shia who have taken refuge in the marsh area of southern Iraq. We have made our concerns known to the head of the Iraqi interests section in London and to the Iraqi permanent representative at the United Nations and have urged the Iraqis to allow humanitarian relief into the area quickly.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what powers executive agencies have to change their financial regime without first amending their framework document.

Mr. Renton: Agency chief executives keep their financial and other management regimes under review, with the aim of developing the framework best suited to their business needs. Significant changes in an agency's financial regime would require the agreement of the responsible Minister and the Treasury. In many cases, there will be sufficient flexibility in the framework document to allow for changes, so no further amendment is required. But where such changes are not covered the framework document will need to be revised.

TRANSPORT

London Underground

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the agreed expenditure for investment on the Circle line of London Underground over the next three years; and whether he has any plans to increase it.

Mr. Freeman: The Government do not set levels of investment for individual Underground lines. However, London Underground is in the process of refurbishing the entire fleet of Circle line trains. It is also looking at ways of improving the line's service reliability by combining its running with that of the Hammersmith and City line.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he is having with the Health and Safety Executive in connection with each of the short and long-term recommendations listed in sections 7 and 8

of the May 1991 independent report by consulting engineers on the gantry accident of 4 September 1990 on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Chope: The recommendations are under discussion within the Department. The Health and Safety Executive will be consulted before final decisions are reached.

A6 Chapel Bypass

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the final price paid to the construction company involved in the A6 Chapel bypass as compared to the original contract price.

Mr. Chope: The original tender sum for the contract was £17·031 million. The total contractor's account was settled at £43·703 million.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton of 3 July, on the M11 link road, if he will list those standards established in the case of the M40, referred to by the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) in the debate on the New Roads and Street Works Bill in Standing Committee E on 14 March, *Official Report*, column 25, which can be applied to urban roads such as the M11 link road.

Mr. Chope: As is made clear in the answer to which the hon. Member refers, the measures taken to mitigate any evironmental impact of a new road depend on the individual nature of each project.

Maidstone Bypass

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to let a contract for the widening of the M20 Maidstone bypass; and what completion date will be specified.

Mr. Chope: The contract for the widening of the Maidstone bypass section of the M20 between junctions 5 and 8 was let on 4 July to Balfour Beatty Ltd. Work will begin before the end of July for completion by the spring of 1993.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *59-60*.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department regularly commissions surveys. A list of all surveys is maintained but it is not possible to identify easily from this list those surveys which have included questions of opinion. My hon. Friend's answer of 20 December 1990 referred to 370 surveys of all types reported in the years 1985 to 1989. A further 101 surveys were reported in 1990 and I am sending a list of these to the hon. Member.

British Rail (Safety)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there are any plans to change British Rail's quality of service objectives to take account of the case for manning of rail stations in London by British Rail staff during the hours that such stations are timetabled to receive trains, and the provision at all stations of security cameras and emergency telephones.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* The staffing of stations is a matter for the BR board.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many assaults have taken place at unmanned British Rail stations in the past five years, and how many such stations had no security cameras and no emergency telephones.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 1 July 1991]:* In 1989 and 1990 four assaults, of which one was serious, occurred at unmanned stations in the Greater London area. Figures for previous years and other areas are not readily available.

ENERGY

Oil and Gas Exploration

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many blocks of the United Kingdom continental shelf have been licensed for oil and gas exploration within the past 10 years despite sustained objections from the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Moynihan: The Nature Conservancy Council has registered concerns about a number of blocks offered for oil and gas licensing in the past 10 years. These concerns have been met by applying conditions and restrictions to activity under the licences or by not offering the relevant blocks. In this period, the Nature Conservancy Council has objected to the offer for licensing of six blocks or pairs of blocks. Three of these were offered in the 10th round, but not subsequently licensed; three were licensed in the 12th round of offshore licensing.

Radioactive Waste (Contamination)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether radioactive wastes contaminated with plutonium arising from the reprocessing of foreign spent fuel at *(a)* Sellafield and *(b)* Dounreay are covered by existing nuclear safeguards agreements.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All civil nuclear material is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the United Kingdom-Euratom-International Atomic Energy Authority safeguards agreement. The UK-Euratom-IAEA safeguards agreement provides, however, that safeguards shall be terminated when the material has been diluted to the point at which it is practicably irrecoverable.

Nuclear Electric

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy for what reason he prevented Nuclear Electric from launching a publicity and advertising campaign in July.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The decision to postpone a proposed advertising campaign was taken by Nuclear Electric plc.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) when he last discussed directors' pay with Nuclear Electric;

(2) whether it is his policy that the pay of the directors of Nuclear Electric should be comparable with that of directors of the privatised electricity companies;

(3) what criteria he uses when determining the pay of the directors of Nuclear Electric.

Mr. Wakeham: I last discussed pay with members of the board of Nuclear Electric on 4 June 1991. Our approach in respect of all publicly owned companies is to pay salaries sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate the manpower the company needs.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions paper for the printing of share certificates for the flotation at the electricity distribution companies was returned to the paper suppliers; whether any financial loss occurred to the Department as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. All the paper ordered for the printing of interim share certificates required in the regional electricity companies share offers was either used, returned to the supplier at no cost, or sold to a third party without loss.

EC Energy Ministers

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet his opposite numbers in other European Community countries; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Wakeham: I expect to meet my opposite numbers at the next Energy Council, on 29 October, when we will discuss a number of energy-related subjects.

I also hope to have separate meetings later this year with the German Minister for Economic Affairs, the Dutch Minister for Economic Affairs and the Portuguese Minister for Industry and Energy. In each case, European energy matters will form the basis for discussion.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *39*.

Mr. Wakeham: The only advertising agency currently employed in any of the campaigns listed in my earlier answer is Laing Henry for the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry. My Department does not usually retain companies in a purely promotional or public relations role.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the cost, and the benefits, of his Department's exhibit on renewable energy resources at the recent exhibition on the environment, wildlife and conservation at Olympia.

Mr. Moynihan: The total cost of the Department of Energy's participation in this exhibition is expected to be £24,000. This event forms part of the programme for promoting renewable energy, including the raising of public awareness and the involvement of industry in the development and deployment of renewable energy technologies. An analysis of inquiries will be carried out to assess the effectiveness of the material provided.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *13*.

Mr. Wakeham: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *39*, if he will list the commencement date and duration of each publicity campaign.

Mr. Wakeham: The energy efficiency, offshore supplies industry and renewable energy campaigns are ongoing, and have been running for a number of years. The joint campaign with the Department of the Environment is expected to commence in the autumn of 1991 and continue until 1993-94.

Fourth Landward Licensing Round

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the response to the fourth landward licensing round.

Mr. Moynihan: The fourth landward licensing round which closed at noon on 20 June attracted 35 applications for exploration licences from 39 companies or groups of companies. I will now be considering all the applications on their merits. The new licences resulting from this round, which I hope to announce towards the end of the summer, should help to maintain the momentum of exploration onshore in Britain.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the public opinion surveys conducted by, for or on behalf of, the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Law Officers since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *1*, giving the date and purpose of each survey.

The Attorney-General: No national public opinion survey has been conducted by, for or on behalf of the Lord Chancellor's Department or any of the Departments for which I am responsible since 17 December 1990. No records are held centrally of any local surveys that may have been conducted by area staff of the Crown prosecution service, and such information could be acquired only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Bank and Building Society Lending

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annualised percentage growth of bank and building society lending was, seasonally adjusted, over the six months to *(a)* May 1991 and *(b)* June 1991.

Mr. Norman Lamont: For the six months to the end of May 1991 the banks' and building societies' lending to the M4 private sector annualised growth rate was 7·1 per cent. (seasonally adjusted).

The June 1991 figure is not available yet. It will be given in line 23 of table A of the Bank of England's monetary statistics notice, due for publicaton on 29 July 1991.

NUCPS (Pay Dispute)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his reasons for refusing to refer the pay dispute with the National Union of Civil and Public Servants to the Civil Service Arbitration tribunal; and if he will now reconsider that decision.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Under the terms of the long-term pay agreement with the NUCPS, arbitration is an option only if both parties agree. Arbritration was rejected because pay should reflect what is needed to recruit, retain and motivate staff within what can be afforded. The offer took these factors into account and is within the parameters of the pay agreement.

The NUCPS has now accepted the offer.

Building Societies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet building society representatives to discuss the Government response to the Woolwich judicial review result.

Mr. Maples: I have no plans to do so. The Building Societies Association has not asked for such a meeting.

Obscene Publications

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many imported publications deemed to be obscene have been seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the past five years; how many persons have been prosecuted for this trade; and what punishments were imposed.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the five years 1986 to 1991 a total of 157,689 publications deemed to be indecent or obscene were seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. 37[illegible] persons were prosecuted leading to a total of 36 years 9[illegible] months imprisonment (including 18 years 1 month suspended sentences), seven years probation and fines and costs totalling £183,171.

Public Servants' Pensions

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement about the Government's policy of abating the pensions of public servants who are re-employed in the public service after retirement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government have completed their review of the current abatement policy.

My hon. Friend the then Economic Secretary announced on 21 December 1989 at col *370* that the pay or pension of retired public servants would no longer be subject to abatement if they were re-employed in a different public service after retirement. This change did not extend to those who retire early from one public service and are subsequently re-employed in another. They continue to be subject to abatement until they reach the normal retirement age in the public service from which they first retired.

The Government have now given further consideration to the abatement arrangements for those who are re-employed in the same public service from which they draw pension. Here, re-employment is a continuation of the employment from which the pension derives and we have concluded that a public service pension should not normally be payable where the employee has not genuinely retired from that public service. Circumstances may occur in the future in a particular public service for which a relaxation of abatement might be appropriate but no such case has been made so, for the present, we do not consider that any significant change is warranted in the current policy or its application. Abatement will generally continue to apply for those who are re-employed in the same public service from which they draw pension. There will, however, be some minor changes to remove anomalies which will ease the effect of abatement in some cases and will simplify administration.

Civil Service Employees

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers, locations and departments of all civil servants employed in Gwent and Glamorgan.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 9 July 1991]:* At 1 April 1991 the number of non-industrial civil servants employed in Gwent and Glamorgan was 22,165. Analyses by location and by department are given in tables 1 and 2 respectively. No figures are held centrally of the number of industrial civil servants employed in Gwent and Glamorgan.

Table 1
Numbers of non-industrial civil servants in Gwent and Glamorgan
Staff in post at 1 April 1991

Location	*Headcount*
Gwent	3,304
of which:	
Blaenau Gwent	203
Islwyn	104
Monmouth	443
Newport	2,149
Torfaen	405
Glamorgan	18,861
of which:	
Cynon Valley	234
Merthyr Tydfil	349
Ogwr	384
Rhondda	166
Rhymney Valley	247
Taff Ely	930
Cardiff	9,354
Vale of Glamorgan	621
Afan	262
Lliw Valley	5
Neath	154
Swansea	6,155

Source: Mandate.

Table 2
Numbers of non-industrial civil servants in Gwent

Department	*Staff in post at 1 April 1991 (headcount)*
Central Statistical Office	789
Customs and Excise	48
Crown Prosecution Service	32

Department	Staff in post at 1 April 1991 (headcount)
Ministry of Defence	135
Employment Department Group	390
Home Office	401
Inland Revenue	326
Lord Chancellor's Department	102
Department of Social security	581
DTI	435
Department of Transport	28
Welsh Office	18
Other departments	19
Total	3,304

Source: MANDATE.

Numbers of non-industrial civil servants in Glamorgan

Department	Staff in post at 1 April 1991 (headcount)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	38
Customs and Excise	405
Crown Prosecution Service	184
Ministry of Defence	713
Employment Department Group	1,558
Department of the Environment (excluding PSA)	14
PSA	280
Export Credits Guarantee Department	693
HMSO	17
Home Office	480
Inland Revenue	3,261
Lord Chancellor's Department	511
Land Registry	737
Mint, Royal	371
Ordnance Survey	30
Department of Social Security	2,321
DTI	1,139
Department of Transport	4,343
Welsh Office	1,740
Other departments	26
Total	18,861

Source: MANDATE.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Environmental Aid Projects

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria his Department's Overseas Development Administration uses to judge appropriate time horizons when considering the funding of environmental aid projects.

Mrs. Chalker: Consistent with the principles of sustainable development, we aim to take a long term view of every environmental impact of projects we finance, and pay special attention to any possible irreversible effects. No generally agreed criteria exist for judging appropriate specific time horizons and qualitative judgments are often needed especially where it is not possible fully to quantify environmental costs and benefits. We have financed work by the Overseas Development Institute, published last month as a book "Values for the Environment: A Guide to Economic Appraisal" by J. T. Winpenny, which will provide guidance on these issues to ODA economists and others. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Iraq

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the sums committed by Her Majesty's Government in humanitarian assistance to Iraq *(a)* for relief operations for refugees and *(b)* in total.

Mrs. Chalker: Since 4 April 1991, the Government have committed £61·5 million for Iraqi refugees. The Government also committed £18·37 million during 1990-91 for humanitarian assistance to refugees in the Gulf crisis area.

Malawi

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation of human rights in Malawi.

Mrs. Chalker: Observance of human rights in Malawi is showing welcome improvement. A total of 88 detainees have been released so far this year. The Malawi Government have told us that all remaining cases of detention without trial are under review. We seek an end to detention without trial in Malawi as elsewhere.

World Bank Report

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make it his policy to assist in the widespread distribution in the United Kingdom of the forthcoming annual world development report of the World Bank on environmental and development matters.

Mrs. Chalker: The 1991 World development report, "The Challenge of Development", was published by the World Bank on 8 July. I endorse its main thesis that successful development requires the public and private sectors each to play an appropriate role, and to do so effectively. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

The 1992 report will deal with development and the environment and will be published next April.

World development reports deserve to be widely distributed and the World Bank already has machinery in place to achieve this.

Contraceptive and Infant Health Care Advice

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance in regard to contraceptive advice and infant health care is made available by Her Majesty's Government to nations covered by the Lomé convention in the Pacific, Caribbean and Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: A specific focus on population and demography is included for the first time in the fourth Lomé convention signed in December 1989, although under earlier conventions the EC financed a number of projects in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in the health sector. The Commission is now preparing projects reflecting the new focus in co-operation with Governments of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Iraq

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made by the United Kingdom Government either individually or in conjunction with the international community to meet the humanitarian requirements of the Shi'ite population in southern Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The relief programmes of the United Nations and the Red Cross and Red Crescent provide humanitarian assistance to displaced people throughout Iraq. Britain has so far contributed US$16 million to the UN appeal launched in May and £2·5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross. A UN mission is currently in Iraq to assess the situation particularly in the southern part of the country. We shall give its report our full consideration.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export of Goods Order

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the amendments made to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989; and if he has any plans to make any further amendments.

Mr. Sainsbury: Seven amendment orders to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 have been made:

Amendment No. 1 came into force 14 February 1990
Amendment No. 2 came into force 30 April 1990
Amendment No. 3 came into force 15 April 1990
Amendment No. 4 came into force 11 August 1990
Amendment No. 5 came into force 31 August 1990
Amendment No. 6 came into force 21 December 1990
Amendment No. 7 came into force 10 July 1991

It is planned to introduce a consolidated order incorporating these amendments later this year. Additional amendments to export controls reflecting agreement reached in various international regimes of which the United Kingdom is a member are anticipated.

Insurance Selling

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he intends to take to ensure that the coverage of the Association of British Insurance code of practice guidelines for general insurance selling are *(a)* complete and *(b)* enforced and whether he has any plans to refer this matter to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Redwood: All Association of British Insurance members agree to adhere to the provisions of the code. Its operation is overseen by an independent monitoring committee on which my Department is represented. I believe that the code is working satisfactorily, but the monitoring committee will be undertaking a full review next year. Any evidence to the contrary should be sent to the monitoring committee. I have no plans to refer the code to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Maintenance Contracts

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about alleged unfair terms in maintenance contracts for office and industrial equipment, excluding photocopier leasing agreements.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has received three complaints over the last three months alleging unfair terms in maintenance contracts for office equipment other than photocopiers. All three complaints have been about maintenance and leasing agreements for facsimile equipment.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave him on 18 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *23-24*. That statement applies equally to all maintenance contracts for office and industrial equipment.

Fraud

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to bring forward proposals to place a duty on auditors to report fraud, or suspicion of fraud.

Mr. Redwood: As the Government made clear in their response to the report of the Trade and Industry Select Committee on company investigations, we do not believe that a statutory duty should be imposed on auditors to report fraud, or suspicions of fraud, to the authorities. We believe that the action to be taken by auditors in respect of fraud is best left to professional guidance and we welcome the profession's initiative in publishing last year the auditing guideline on the auditor's responsibilities in respect of fraud, other irregularities and errors, which all auditors are expected to follow.

Export Licences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether export licences are required for the sale by British companies of *(a)* technology, *(b)* engineering design and *(c)* building design blueprints or plans, where the development of such blueprints or plans involves military equipment or premises.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* In 1989 the export controls covering military equipment to certain countries were extended to include all products involving the combination and construction of metallic or non-metallic materials specially designed to provide ballistic protection for military systems. Similarly, all technology engineering design and building design blueprints or plans relating to these products now require a licence.

Friendly Societies

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he proposes to initiate legislation for the reform of friendly societies.

Mr. Maples: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) on 3 June 1991, *Official Report*, column *23*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Services

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of fire engines and average populations served by each fire brigade station in London for each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The number of front-line pumping appliances based at each fire station in the London fire brigade for each year from 1979 to 1991 is shown in the table. Information about the population served by each fire station in the London fire brigade is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Front line pumping appliances based at London fire stations, 1979-1991

Fire Station	Year 1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Acton	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Addington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Barbican	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Barking	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Barnet	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Battersea	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Beckenham	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Belsize	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bethnal Green	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Bexley	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Biggin Hill	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bow	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Brixton	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Bromley	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Cannon Street	2	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chelsea	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Chingford	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chiswick	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Clapham	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Clerkenwell	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Croydon	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dagenham	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Deptford	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dockhead	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dowgate	—	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Downham	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Ealing	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
East Greenwich	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
East Ham	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Edmonton	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Eltham	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Enfield	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Erith	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Euston	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Feltham	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Finchley	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Forest Hill	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Fulham	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Greenwich	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Hainault	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hammersmith	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Hayes	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Harrow	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hendon	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Heston	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Hillingdon	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Holloway	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Homerton	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Hornchurch	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Hornsey	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Ilford	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Islington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kensington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kentish Town	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kingsland	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kingston	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Knightsbridge	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lambeth	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Lambeth River	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Lee Green	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Lewisham	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Leyton	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Leytonstone	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Manchester Square	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mill Hill	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Millwall	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mitcham	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
New Cross	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
New Malden	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Norbury	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
North Kensington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Fire Station	Year 1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Northolt	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Old Kent Road	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Orpington	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Paddington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Park Royal	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Peckham	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Plaistow	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Plumstead	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Poplar	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Purley	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Richmond	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Romford	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Ruislip	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sanderstead	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Shadwell	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Shooters Hill	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Shoreditch	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Sidcup	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Silvertown	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Soho	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Southall	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Southgate	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Southwark	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Stanmore	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Stoke Newington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Stratford	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Surbiton	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sutton	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Tooting	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Tottenham	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Twickenham	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wallington	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Walthamstow	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wandsworth	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wennington	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wembley	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
West Hampstead	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Westminster	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
West Norwood	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Whitechapel	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Willesden	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Wimbledon	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Woodford	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Woodside	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Woolwich	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Notes:

1. These figures do not include special appliances, such as hydraulic platforms or turntable ladders, nor pumping appliances maintained as part of the Brigade's reserve fleet.
2. The figures shown in this table derive from establishment returns submitted by the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority relating to the establishment on 1 January each year.

Junior Crime Prevention Panels

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the presentation of his awards to the west midlands junior crime prevention panels.

Mr. John Patten: Although my right hon. Friend has made no awards of prizes to west midlands junior crime prevention panels, I acknowledged and thanked those involved for the valuable work which they undertake during my address to the crime prevention conference "A Matter of Youth" held at Edgbaston on 18 October 1990. Home Office grants totalling £6,155 have been made under the safer cities programme to support and promote the work of junior crime prevention panels in the west midlands.

Refugees (Legal Advice)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration was given to the obligations in the international conventions on refugees that there should be no discrimination in access to legal advice and assistance in proposing the ending of green form legal advice and assistance to refugees.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In their review of asylum arrangements the Government have taken full account of the United Kingdom's international obligations. The planned change in eligibility for green form legal aid, which relates to all immigration matters, is compatible with these obligations. In this area the primary remedy lies in appeals to the immigration appellate authorities, for which free advice and representation is available from the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. We have no plans to alter access to the High Court in these cases or eligibility for legal aid for litigation there.

Mr. Paul Cleeland

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for his Department's document on Paul Alexander Cleeland's trial to be further

amended in respect of the comments of the preparer of the document so that it refers only to the summing-up of the trial judge.

Mr. John Patten: Following my reply to a question from the hon. Member on 1 May 1991 at column *178*, a copy of the revised Home Office memorandum on Mr. Cleeland's conviction was placed in the Library. We are now considering whether there are grounds to justify the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in the conviction of Mr. Cleeland. As part of the review of the case, we will consider whether any further amendments to the Home Office memorandum on Mr. Cleeland's conviction are necessary.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *4*.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has carried out four public opinion surveys since 17 December 1990:

—two surveys of attitudes to crime and crime prevention among adults, done before and after Crime Prevention Week in April 1991;

—two surveys about crime prevention, carried out in March and May 1991, as part of a series of surveys to test the effectiveness of crime prevention publicity.

Some questions on attitudes to punishment were also put to 12 to 19-year-olds in May 1991 in an omnibus survey.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons in which Mr. Charlie McGhee (MM2170) has been held in the six weeks up to 5 July; and if he will give reasons for transfer in each case.

Mrs. Rumbold: Charles McGhee—MM2170—who is a category A prisoner, was transferred on three occasions in the six weeks up to 5 July 1991. On 7 June, Mr. McGhee was transferred to Frankland prison from Full Sutton prison in the interests of maintaining good order and discipline. On 23 June, following an incident at Frankland prison, it became necessary to move a number of prisoners, including Mr. McGhee, who was transferred to Long Lartin. On subsequent review, it proved necessary to move him again, in the interests of good order and discipline, and on 28 June he was transferred to Wakefield prison.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those countries with which the United Kingdom has a prisoner transfer ratification agreement; how the parole systems in each country are affected by transfer; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The following countries have joined the United Kingdom in ratifying the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons:

Austria
Belgium
Canada
Cyprus
Denmark
Finland
France
Greece
Italy
Luxembourg
Malta
Netherlands
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
USA

A bilateral agreement has also been signed with the Government of Thailand.

We do not have comprehensive information about the parole systems in other countries. The necessary details are established when an application for transfer is received.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *4*.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Home Office uses the following advertising agencies:

Collett Dickinson Pearce and Partners Limited—Crime Prevention

FCO Limited—Fire Prevention and Safety, Electoral Registration, Absent voting

Riley Advertising—Police Recruitment: Graduate/Ethnic, Police Special Constable Recruitment, Prison Service Recruitment

BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Limited—Passports

My Department does not use public relations companies. We do not currently use a promotional agency, although we did engage Clarke Hooper Consulting Limited for last April's Crime Prevention Week.

"Civil Protection Magazine" is produced by the Home Office and the Central Office of Information.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

SERC Projects

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the practice for the Science and Engineering Council in setting up a capital project with regard to estimating and recording the actual manpower used at the end of a project.

Mr. Alan Howarth: We have been informed by the SERC that under arrangements now in force for consideration of major capital projects, full account is taken of the estimated direct and indirect manpower costs involved. Detailed arrangements for subsequent monitoring during project construction also apply.

Education Resources

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply of 21 February, *Official Report*, columns *235-36*, he will publish the same tables with deductions for capital expenditure from the appropriate heading.

Mr. Fallon: The figures published in my reply of 21 February already exclude capital expenditure. The potential schools budget is the general schools budget less expenditure on five items excepted from delegation: capital; government specific grants; home to school transport; school meals; and transitional exceptions.

National Curriculum

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to inquire into the activities and costs of educational institutes following the Government's decision that the language in the national curriculum report was not of an adequate standard to merit publication.

Mr. Eggar: No such inquiry is necessary. My right hon. and learned Friend has decided that the materials should not be published so that they would be used only for their intended purpose and not used in the classroom as teaching materials.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, what action he is taking to recover the full amount spent on the unpublished language in the national curriculum report from educational institutes and other bodies engaged in its preparation.

Mr. Eggar: Language in the curriculum is a three-year training programme for teachers, now entering its final phase. The cost of producing the training package used in the programme was about £120,000. The question of recovering costs does not arise.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has held with Nottingham university concerning research contracts between his Department and the university following his decision in respect of the language in the national curriculum report.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no discussion with the university of Nottingham concerning research contracts.

Salaries

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on parity of salaries between clinical academic staff and their NHS counterparts.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, as the representatives of university employers, to settle the pay levels of clinical and other academic staff within the aggregate resources available. The Government take account of relative pay and price costs and other relevant factors in determining aggregate public funding for the universities.

Medical Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the British Medical Association on the impact on medical education of underfunding of universities; and how he has responded.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Two letters about university funding and other matters have been received recently from the medical academic staff committee of the BMA. In reply, we have made clear that it is for individual universities to determine the funding of medical schools within the aggregate resources at their disposal, including the planned increase in available public funding in 1991-92 of some 10 per cent. for the second year running.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *41*.

Mr. Eggar: Further policy evaluation projects of the kind described in my reply on this subject on 17 December, which we have commissioned from the relevant budget since then are:

Effective management in schools.
Employment and development of teachers after long INSET courses.
Follow-up of a survey service on bully/victim problems.
Family expenditure survey 1991/92 (DES contribution).

Haberdashers' Aske's CTC

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) in determining the percentage of his contribution towards any additional capital costs of establishing the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college, what account he will take of the Haberdashers' Company's agreement to underwrite extra sponsorship income for the college during the period in which the initial capital works will be completed;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *187*, what percentage up to 80 per cent. he will agree to contribute towards any additional capital costs of establishing the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college;

(3) what additional capital costs, beyond those specified in paragraph 8(ii) of the funding agreement signed on 21 December 1990, are expected to be incurred in establishing the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college;

(4) over what period he anticipates that the initial capital works for establishing the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college will be carried out.

Mr. Eggar: I am discussing possible design changes to proposed capital works with the sponsors. I am not yet in a position to confirm the extent of any changes, associated costs and their apportionment.

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assistance is provided by his Department to British Nuclear Fuels plc in support of its educational programme for school governors.

Mr. Fallon: As part of our general programme of support for school governors, the Department and Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools participated last December in the annual seminar organised by British Nuclear Fuels plc for its employees who are governors.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *43-44*.

Mr. Eggar: The teacher recruitment campaign has been designed by Saatchi and Saatchi Advertising Limited.

No company has yet been selected to undertake the publicity campaign to provide parents with information about changes in the education system.

The services to business campaign, run as part of the Department's professional, industrial and commercial updating (PICKUP) programme, is managed by Quadrangle Communications Limited.

Voluntary Aided Schools

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools applied to become voluntary aided schools during each of the past four years; in how many cases were the applications supported by the local education authority; and how many of these applications were subsequently approved by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Fallon: The information on the number of independent schools which have applied to the Secretary of State since 1987 for voluntary-aided status is provided in the table.

Year proposals published	*Number of proposals published*	*Number supported by LEA*	*Number approved*
1987	2	2	1
1988	0	0	0
1989	1	0	[1]—
1990	1	1	0
1991	1	0	[1]—

[1] Still outstanding.

Nuclear Physics, Daresbury

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the total manpower costs for nuclear physics at Daresbury for each year since 1974.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not held centrally by the Department. The hon. Member may wish to direct his question to the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the annual extra overhead costs to be borne by the remainder of Daresbury laboratory as a result of the ending of the NSF contributions to those overhead costs.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not held centrally by the Department. My hon. Friend may wish to direct his question to the Science and Engineering Research Council.

British School

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, if he will make additional provision for construction costs of the British school in Armenia in 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Parliamentary approval for my Department to make final payments for the Armenian school project will be sought in a winter supplementary estimate for the schools, research and miscellaneous services vote (class XI, vote 1). This will provide mainly for some minor remedial work to complete the contract liabilities. The expenditure will be offset by a saving elsewhere on the vote. Pending Parliament's approval, urgent expenditure will be met by a repayable advance of £7,000 from the contingencies fund.

National Curriculum

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, when he intends to publish for consultation the draft order with attainment targets and programmes of study for modern foreign languages in the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have today published for consultation a draft order with an associated document setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for modern foreign languages in the national curriculum for pupils aged 11 to 16, as I am required to do by section 20(5) of the Education Reform Act 1988. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The draft order has been prepared following advice to me from the National Curriculum Council, in the light of its consultations on the proposals made by the former holder of my office and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. I am most grateful to the council for its advice.

I have accepted the council's recommendations for attainment targets and programmes of study as a basis for further consultation. The National Curriculum Council has recommended a reduction in the total number of statements of attainment from 144 to 102. I have accepted this change and believe that it will be helpful in reducing the assessment load on teachers. I have however, made a few minor changes of wording, particularly to the non-statutory examples.

The draft order for modern foreign languages sets out a range of essential language competences; concentrates on the ability of pupils to use foreign languages effectively for communication; highlights the importance of cultural awareness as an integral part of language learning and ensures that all pupils will receive a stimulating and worthwhile challenge in order to raise standards and stretch even the most able learners at the upper levels of attainment.

The period for consultation on the draft order will end on 4 October 1991. I intend to make the final order in November 1991 in good time for schools to begin teaching national curriculum modern foreign languages to pupils aged 11 from the following autumn.

I have also accepted the national curriculum council's recommendation that the format of the order made under section 3(2) (b) of the Education Reform Act be amended from two schedules to a single list of specified languages. I intend to make a new section 3 order at the same time as the final order in November 1991.

Truancy

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he proposes to take to reduce truancy rates in schools.

Mr. Fallon *[pursuant to the reply, 15 April 1991, columns 51-52]:* My right hon. and learned Friend and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales have today laid before Parliament regulations on pupil registration and the publication of information about rates of unauthorised absence. These require that from the

beginning of the next school year, schools distinguish in their attendance registers between authorised and unauthorised absences of pupils of compulsory school age and from August 1992 maintained schools' prospectuses and annual reports include specified information on rates of unauthorised absence.

These regulations have been laid after a two-month consultation period in which widespread support was expressed for our proposed action on school attendance. They will stimulate all schools to give a high priority to attendance. Schools in turn should be able to look to parents to shoulder their responsibilities to secure their children's attendance at school.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environment Exhibition, Olympia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost and the benefit of his Ministry's exhibit at the recent exhibition on environment, wildlife and conservation at Olympia; and what special literature was produced for the event.

Mr. Curry: The cost of the Department's exhibit at the *Sunday Times* exhibition on environment, wildlife and conservation at Olympia, was £100,000 of which £27,000 was for site rental. The exhibit explains how MAFF, in association with other Government Departments and agencies, works to achieve a balance in the use of the countryside and surrounding rivers and seas. A brochure entitled "Balance in the Countryside" is being used to support the exhibit.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column 72.

Mr. Curry: Current publicity campaigns are based on the opinion surveys commissioned by the Department prior to 17 December 1990. No further surveys have been undertaken since that date.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent on the United Kingdom set-aside scheme for each year since 1989-90; what are his estimates for 1992-93 and 1993-94; and what account in these estimates has been taken of the agreements reached at the Agriculture Council meeting in May.

Mr. Curry: The table shows the actual amounts paid to United Kingdom participants in the 1989-90 and 1990-91 financial years and the estimates of payments to be made in the period 1991-92 to 1993-94. The estimates do not take account of the agreement reached at the Agriculture Council meeting in May.

Financial years	*£ million*
1989-90	[1] 9·84
1990-91	[1] 19·11
1991-92	[2] 27·92
1992-93	[2] 49·37
1993-94	[2] 48·91

[1] Actual.
[2] Estimated.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the results of inspections his Ministry has carried out on the set-aside scheme including *(a)* the number of farms visited and *(b)* the percentage visited of the total in set-aside; and how many breaches of regulation have been identified, for each year of the scheme.

Mr. Curry: The Community set-aside rules require member states to inspect a minimum of 5 per cent. of holdings on which land is being set aside under the scheme. It is not departmental policy to indicate the expected or achieved levels of inspection in the interests of proper enforcement. In the United Kingdom, in the first year of the scheme, significant irregularities were found on 2 per cent. of the holdings inspected.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the five-year set-aside scheme in 1991-92; and whether he will allow the use of set-aside land to grow non-food crops.

Mr. Gummer: The five-year set-aside scheme will be open to new applications from 1 August 1991. The only changes to the rules of the existing scheme will be to provide for the partial refund of cereals coresponsibility levy paid between 31 July 1991 and 30 June 1992 to set-aside participants. The refund is expected (subject to detailed Commission rules) to amount to £2·68 per tonne. Application forms and explanatory booklets will be available from local divisional offices at the end of this month. These forms must be returned by 30 September 1991.

I have consulted interested bodies on the EC regulations permitting member states to permit the growing of cereals for non-food uses on set-aside land. In the light of that consultation and the report to the House of Lords by the Select Committee on European Communities (Sub-Committee D) on non-food uses of agricultural products I have concluded that we should not introduce such a scheme in the United Kingdom. I will, however, continue to keep the possibility under review.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the uptake of the set-aside scheme, including the number of farms and the area of land set aside in hectares in England in 1990 and 1991;

(2) if he will list the numbers of farms, the numbers of hectares and the average area per farm in hectares which are in the set-aside scheme in each county in 1991;

(3) what amount of land in *(a)* hectares and *(b)* percentage terms in set-aside was used for different land use options in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the press release dated 17 December 1990, which is available in the Library of the House.

Cereals

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the hectareage of land in the United Kingdom under cereals in 1991.

Mr. Curry: The preliminary estimate of the area sown to cereals in the United Kingdom for the 1991 harvest is 3·6 million hectares.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *75*.

Mr. Curry: The Department has employed no advertising, promotional or public relations companies in connection with these campaigns.

Design and production of the touring exhibition was carried out under contract by Interactive Learning Productions; and design work on the revision of food publications is being carried out under contract by Trickett and Webb Ltd.

Residues (Meat)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce further controls on residues of veterinary medicines in meat; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am issuing a consultation document today on our proposals and I intend to introduce regulations under the Food Safety Act which will significantly strengthen existing controls on the presence of veterinary medicines in meat and meat products. There has been concern that the mis-use of veterinary medicines can pose a threat to the health of consumers through residues passing into the food chain.

The new measures will contain the following key elements:

to make it an offence to submit an animal for slaughter containing residues in excess of prescribed maximum limits;

to make it an offence to sell meat or meat products with excess residues;

to make it an offence to fail to observe the withdrawal period stipulated in the literature associated with licensed veterinary medicinal products;

to enable carcases found to contain excess residues to be immediately condemned as unfit for human or animal consumption;

to enable animals found to contain illegal beta-agonists or other unlicensed veterinary medicinal products to be compulsorily slaughtered other than for human or animal consumption.

The consultation document has been issued to interested parties and copies have also been placed in the Library of the House. Consultation with the European Commission will also be necessary. I expect to be able to lay the final regulation before the House in October.

The British agricultural industry has a fine reputation for the safe use of veterinary medicines. These measures will protect that reputation and I hope that other countries in the European Community will be prepared to take and enforce similar measures.

Voluntary Organisations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those voluntary organisations which are receiving grant aid from his Ministry in 1991-92 and his estimates for 1992-93; and if he will list the amounts which each organisation is to receive.

Mr. Gummer: The following voluntary organisations will benefit from grants made by my Department in 1991-92. Estimates for 1992-93 are also given.

Organisation	*Grant for 1991-92* £	*Estimated grant for 1992-93* £
Dartington Institute (Project Sylvanus)	5,050	2,300
Farming and Wildlife Trust	[2]76,500	[1]—
National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	19,436	19,922
National Proficiency Tests Council	75,000	37,000
Rural (Responsible Use of Resources in Agriculture and on the Land)	2,500	[1]—

[1] These grants are under review.
[2] £6,500 of this is a subscription.

Blue Ear Pig Disease

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which counties restrictions on pigs are in force due to blue ear disease; which counties were included in his chief veterinary officer's notification of the disease to the EC under Commission decision 91/237/EEC dated 1 July 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 24 June at column *383* and the information placed in the Library of the House accordingly.

WALES

Hazardous Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the amounts of hazardous waste imported into Great Britain for incineration through Welsh ports from the Irish Republic in each year since October 1988.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows.

	Waste (tonnes)
1 October 1988 to 31 March 1989	43·0
1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	316·4
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	501·2

School Meals

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the percentage of school meals received by pupils per local education authority in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools for each of the years since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information, as at September of each year, is given in the table.

Number of pupils receiving school meals, as a percentage of the pupils present

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Primary												
Clwyd	69	48	46	55	62	58	56	54	53	48	49	49
Dyfed	86	67	74	75	75	73	70	67	66	61	62	62
Gwent	66	61	63	63	64	64	61	61	62	59	61	57
Gwynedd	85	70	71	68	71	70	67	67	68	63	62	61
Mid Glamorgan	68	58	63	62	66	68	64	63	63	59	59	57
Powys	85	66	88	78	79	69	62	64	63	62	64	66
South Glamorgan	64	49	50	43	46	48	48	48	48	46	46	47
West Glamorgan	67	48	58	56	60	53	51	51	49	45	45	45
Wales	71	57	61	60	64	62	59	59	58	55	55	54
Secondary												
Clwyd	44	31	34	30	39	51	43	42	43	43	38	41
Dyfed	54	66	65	69	67	72	69	69	70	67	66	65
Gwent	33	35	40	39	46	53	44	49	52	50	52	56
Gwynedd	59	52	58	56	55	56	53	54	51	48	41	48
Mid Glamorgan	48	43	46	49	47	55	43	45	44	40	44	45
Powys	58	45	49	53	60	65	49	50	49	48	55	54
South Glamorgan	37	31	37	31	36	39	34	35	38	36	38	36
West Glamorgan	40	34	40	43	49	62	57	56	56	55	47	54
Wales	44	41	45	45	48	55	48	49	50	48	47	49

School Sport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the state of sport in schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend is jointly, with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, considering the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee report on sport in schools. They are also considering the final report of the physical education working group set up to advise on a national curriculum for PE in schools.

As part of the Government's current review of its policies towards sport and active recreation we are also looking at ways in which children of school age can be encouraged to participate in sport both during and outside school hours, including through the further promotion of links between schools and local sports clubs.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new measures he proposes to tackle the housing needs of *(a)* the homeless, *(b)* young families, *(c)* vulnerable single people and *(d)* those with special needs.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have today announced a personal initiative for single or other homeless people with special or severe difficulty. Local authorities have been invited to submit proposals for a pilot scheme to develop new measures of support and make the best use of existing resources, in partnership with other relevant local statutory and non-statutory bodies. Resources of up to £800,000 are to be allocated over a period of three years to fund the scheme.

Local authorities have also been invited to bid against a capital reserve of £2·88 million and revenue support for local voluntary bodies of £150,000 for homelessness projects. The reserve is designed to complement authorities' own efforts in dealing with cases of homelessness, within the context of the approach to partnership with housing associations and voluntary bodies which is developing strongly in Wales.

These measures are additional to plans in hand with Housing for Wales to increase the total housing association stock by over one third by 1993-94, so directly benefiting a range of groups including families and those in special need.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* council, *(b)* private and *(c)* housing association houses have been completed in each of the last 10 years in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the numbers of farms, the numbers of hectares and the average area per farm in hectares which are in the set-aside scheme in each county in 1991;

(2) what was the uptake of the set-aside scheme in *(a)* the number of farms and *(b)* the area of land set aside in hectares for 1990 and 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: Fifty-three farms had entered the scheme by the end of the 1990-91 scheme year. Details are given in the table.

	No. of Holdings Participating	*Area Set Aside (ha)*	*Average Area set Aside per Holding (ha)*
Gwynedd	4	99·33	24·83
Clwyd	4	98·63	24·65
Powys	4	74·16	18·54
Mid Glamorgan	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	1	148·67	148·67
West Glamorgan	3	175·87	58·62
Gwent	6	319·38	53·23
Dyfed	31	884·10	28·52
Total	53	1,800·14	33·96

Cardiff Barrage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has received from the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the proposed Cardiff barrage; and if he proposes to accept its advice.

Mr. David Hunt: My officials have begun discussions with officers of the Countryside Council about issues arising out of the proposed Cardiff barrage. I shall take account of recommendations emerging from these discussions in finalising my proposals.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *35-36*.

Mr. David Hunt: Advertising and promotions companies employed by or on behalf of the Welsh Office on the campaigns detailed in the reply I gave on 1 July 1991 are:

McCann Erickson Payne Golley—Enterprise Wales
Dragon Advertising—Road Safety

The Department has not yet appointed any advertising, promotions or public relations contractor to undertake drugs and alcohol misuse work this financial year.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the real terms funding for Tai Cymru in each of the last three years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the approved gross development programme for Housing for Wales, which includes receipts. The initial allocations, which exclude resources transferred from local authorities, at 1991-92 prices are as follows:

	£ million
1989-90	83·017
1990-91	109·336
1991-92	117·414

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the salaries of the board members of Tai Cymru.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The remuneration of the board members of Housing for Wales, effective from 1 April 1991, is as follows:

	£
Chairman	26,750
Deputy Chairman	8,280
Members	3,625

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of the chairpersons of training and enterprise councils he has appointed in Wales, stating the salaries payable to them and, for each of them, the experience, qualifications and interests which qualified them for appointment.

Mr. David Hunt: Training and enterprise council boards are responsible for the appointment of their chair persons. To be eligible a chair person must be a chief executive of a company; a top operational manager at local level of a major company; or the senior partner in a professional partnership. The appointment is unpaid. The Welsh TEC chairmen are as follows:

Mid Glamorgan
Mr. John W. Phillips (Managing Director, Reliance-Barker-Davies Ltd.).

West Wales
Mr. Robert C. Hastie (Chairman, Bernard Hastie and Company Ltd.).

North East Wales
Mr. John Troth (Managing Director, Dennis Ruabon Ltd.).

South Glamorgan
Mr. Roger G. Helliwell (Group Director, William Cowlin and Son Ltd.).

North West Wales
Mr. Trefor Jones (Chief Executive, Pilkington Optronics Division).

Gwent
Mr. Geoff Canning (Works Manager, British Steel Tinplate).

Powys
Mr. David Margetts (Chairman, Elkay Electrical Manufacturing Company Ltd.).

Trawsfynydd Lake

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further studies he is carrying out on radioactivity in Trawsfynydd lake; and when he expects the results to be available.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The fisheries radiological inspectorate—FRI—of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food provides scientific advice to the Welsh Office which is responsible for radioactive waste disposal authorisations in Wales. The FRI operates a continuing programme of monitoring of radiation dose rates and measuring radioactivity in a variety of environmental materials in the environment of Lake Trawsfynydd. The results are published in the FRI's annual reports of monitoring of radioactivity in surface and coastal waters of the British isles and copies are available in the Library of the House.

An enhanced programme has been set up to obtain samples of sediment cores, in which radioactivity can be measured in specific layers. The results of this additional work will be published in due course; meanwhile, the results so far are comparable where appropriate with the results of the regular monitoring programme.

Oral Surgery

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the date and venue of each of his visits to oral surgery departments in hospitals in Wales since his appointment.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has not made any specific visits to oral surgery departments in hospitals in Wales, but in my capacity as Minister of health in Wales, I visited the dental hospital at the University hospital of Wales on 15 March 1991.

Disability Manifesto

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy towards the recommendations of the "Disability Manifesto: An Agenda for the 1990s", a copy of which has been sent to him, which relate to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 3 July 1991]:* In their responses to similar questions from the right hon. Gentleman, my right hon. and hon. Friends have set out the Government's key policies and programmes in relation to the groups whose needs are referred to in the disability manifesto. Most of these policies and programmes, including in particular the improvements to social security arrangements and employment opportunities, will benefit equally people with disabilities in Wales.

We have a complementary programme to meet the distinctive needs and circumstances of Wales, the aim of which is to enable people with disabilities to play the fullest possible part in the life of their communities.

We have placed particular emphasis on the development of services for people with physical or sensory disabilities in our guidance on the development of social care plans. In Wales these are being prepared jointly, under the leadership of social service authorities, by local health authorities and other agencies, working in close consultation with representatives of the users and carers. The first social care plans will be published in April 1992 and will be available to the public so they can see what services are available, how to gain access to them, and what proposals are being made for their development.

These developments in social care planning build on existing distinctive policies and initiatives in Wales which will continue. These include the all-Wales mental handicap and mental illness strategies under which we are providing £39 million in 1991-92 to promote new patterns of more local and accessible services. We are also continuing our initiative on the elderly under which we are providing £2·38 million in 1991-92 to promote innovation in service delivery which enables people to remain in comfort and dignity in their own homes and communities. Further to encourage the development of more flexible forms of community care for elderly people and those with physical or sensory disabilities, we have introduced in 1991-92 a new grant scheme. Under this almost £1·6 million is being made available, much of it for services provided by voluntary bodies.

On the housing front, local authorities are being encouraged, through their involvement in social care planning, to assess the current and future housing needs of disabled people within their areas. In most cases, it is expected that housing needs will be met by making repairs and adaptations to individuals' existing homes. The recent changes to the disabled facilities grants will ensure that the maximum assistance, up to the total cost of adaptations, will go to those in greatest need. In addition, Housing for Wales has a policy of devoting 10 per cent. of its programme to supported schemes for people with special needs. In the current year it is expected that this will lead to the provision of in excess of 330 new homes, many of which will be for people with learning or physical disabilities.

The Welsh Office is sponsoring once again this year the access award scheme, run by the Wales Council for the Disabled, to encourage good building design with the aim of ensuring that buildings are accessible to people with disabilities.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Visits

2. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister, when he will next pay an official visit to south London.

The Prime Minister: I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and very much hope to include south London among them.

Share Shops

Mr. French: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments have participated in the Government's review of high street share shops as a distribution method for privatisation issues and other equities.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is considering, in consultation with interested colleagues, proposals from the private sector for a retail share distribution network.

China (Visit)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he intends to raise the matters of global warming and climate change, and ozone layer depletion, when he meets members of the Chinese Government during his forthcoming visit to China.

The Prime Minister: Plans for my visit to China are still at an early stage of preparation. The Government are in regular contact with the Chinese authorities to discuss climate change, ozone layer depletion and other international environmental issues.

Environmental Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government were represented at the Ecoasia '91 conference held in Japan in early July.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the new policy proposals on the environment he made to the conference on global problems and solutions on 8 July.

The Prime Minister: Copies of my speech are available in the Library.

World Conservation Monitoring Centre

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what use is made by departments of Her Majesty's Government of the world conservation monitoring centre in Cambridge; and what funds are provided by Her Majesty's Government to support the centre.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to page 52 of the Environment White Paper (Cm. 1200), where attention is drawn to the Government's five-point plan for the conservation of biological diversity in developing

countries. The first of the five points relates to a major study on the status of the world's biodiversity which is being carried out for the Overseas Development Administration by the world conservation monitoring centre. The centre is an independent charity established by leading agencies in the conservation movement including the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations environment programme (UNEP), both of which are supported financially by Her Majesty's Government.

United Nations Bodies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what annual contributions have been made by the United Kingdom since 1979 to the man and biosphere interdisciplinary sciences and natural resource programme of the United Nations Education and Science Organisation; and what benefits have accrued to the United Kingdom from the contributions made.

The Prime Minister: Until the United Kingdom withdrew from the United Nations Education and Science Organisation (UNESCO), in December 1985 no separate contribution was made from aid funds to the man and biosphere (MAB) programme. An assessed contribution was made annually to the UNESCO programme of which MAB is an integral part.

Since our withdrawal from UNESCO research related to the MAB has been maintained through a grant from the Overseas Development Administration to the National Environment Research Council (NERC). The sums given over the past five years are as follows:

	£
1986-87	89,185
1987-88	98,600
1988-89	98,700
1989-90	100,000
1990-91	100,000

Work on the MAB within NERC is undertaken by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology. The institute benefits from these contributions by being able to maintain its research capacity in areas overseas which might not qualify for funding from its other sources. This strengthens the United Kingdom institutional capacity to maintain a broad experience in environmental disciplines and increases our knowledge of the environmental problems affecting other countries, whose perspectives and priorities in addressing environmental issues may differ from those of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to propose to the United Nations that a new agency for the promotion and establishment of new and renewable energy sources be set up under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: The United Nations already has a committee on new and renewable sources of energy, which has achieved little of value. The question of future United Nations institutions in this area is likely to form part of the subject matter of the United Nations conference on environment and development to take place in Rio de Janeiro next year.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects Her Majesty's Government to publish the results of its monitoring of the implementation of carbon dioxide emission reduction policies; and if he will indicate the cost to date of such monitoring.

The Prime Minister: United Kingdom carbon dioxide emission figures are published annually in the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics". The first set of measures to curb emissions was published last September in the Environment White Paper (Cm 1200). We will publish a report in the autumn on progress towards our carbon dioxide target.

It is not possible to estimate separately the cost of monitoring progress on carbon dioxide as monitoring forms part of a wider programme of work on the United Kingdom's response to the threat of climate change, involving a number of departments.

"Our Common Future"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government intend to publish their review of progress in the implementation of the action points set out in the White Paper "Our Common Future" and what has been the total cost to date of the actions taken to implement the proposals and commitments.

The Prime Minister: The first full progress report on the Environment White Paper (Cm 1200) will be published later this year. The essence of the White Paper commitments is the integration of environmental concerns throughout Government policies. The cost of implementation is therefore reflected across a wide range of spending priorities and an all-inclusive figure for the costs of the action taken to date is not readily available. Among the more substantial expenditure committed is:

Water investment by the water companies of £28 billion from 1990 to 2000;

An extra £23·1 million grant-in-aid in 1991-92 for the National Rivers Authority;

£30·2 million representing a rise of 35 per cent. grant-in-aid to the Countryside Commission for 1991-92;

Increase of £4 million for research on renewable energy;

An extra £133 million credit approval for local authorities over the next three years to improve recycling and waste disposal.

Rain Forests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to enhance biodiversity and the protection of the rain forests in south America, south-east Asia and Africa.

The Prime Minister: On biodiversity, our activities are summarised in "Biological Diversity and Developing Countries: Issues and Options", which was published last month and which is in the Library.

British bilateral aid contributions to forest projects in progress or under consideration as at early 1991 are as follows:

	Number of projects	Estimated aid programme costs (£ million)
South America	12	10·5
South East Asia[1]	9	9·4
Africa	74	28·2

[1] Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand.

Environmental Protection and Enhancement Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to publish the consultation paper on his proposals for an environmental protection and enhancement agency, announced on 8 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 8 July 1991 at column *279* by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe).

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HEALTH

Chronic Sick and Disabled Units

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young chronic sick and disabled units have closed in the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell: Our figures show the number of units recording patient activity, not the number of units closed.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of people cared for in young chronic sick and disabled units for each year since 1980.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information is given in the table. The figures from 1980 to 1986 refer to deaths and discharges from units for younger physically disabled and spinal injury units. The information for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is the estimated number of finished ward stays of patients in these units. The figures are not directly comparable.

Year	Units for younger disabled	Spinal injury units	Total
1980	4,383	1,867	6,250
1981	4,936	1,973	6,908
1982	5,340	2,134	7,474
1983	6,239	2,023	8,262
1984	6,576	2,021	8,597
1985	7,251	2,338	9,589
1986	8,904	2,359	11,263
1987-88	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1988-89	10,913	1,358	12,271
1989-90	10,922	2,081	13,003

Source SM12: 1980-1986 Form SH3.
1988/89-1989-90 Form KP20

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young chronic sick and disabled units currently exist within each regional health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of Younger Physically Disabled and Spinal Injury Units by Regional Health Authority 1989-90[1]

Region	1989-90
Northern	8
Yorkshire	10
Trent	11
East Anglian	3
North West Thames	5
North East Thames	11
South East Thames	9
South West Thames	4
Wessex	5
Oxford	6
South Western	5
West Midlands	4
Mersey	3
North Western	6
SHAs	—
Total	90

Source: SM12 KHO3Q
[1] The count is based on bed availability in the period 1 January 1990 to 31 March 1990.

Tower Hamlets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of people employed in Tower Hamlets in *(a)* Tower Hamlets health authority, *(b)* Royal London hospital trust, *(c)* family practitioner service, *(d)* dental service and *(e)* other health-related occupations for each year since 1979.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell: The table provides the figures requested in Tower Hamlets authority from 1982, the earliest date available, to 1989, the latest available. Figures up to 1985 include family practitioner committee staff. It is not possible now to distinguish between family practitioner committee and district health authority figures for those years. On 1 April 1985 family practitioner committees became independent employing authorities. District health authority figures after that date, therefore, exclude FPC staff. Information in respect of the number of people employed by family practitioner committees since 1985 is not held centrally.

Information about the numbers employed by the Royal London hospital trust and other related occupations is not collected centrally.

Tower Hamlets health authority hospital and community health service staff in post[1] *30 September each year.*

Whole time equivalent[2]	
1982	5,470
1983	5,492
1984	5,202
1985	5,024
1986	5,049
1987	4,865
1988	4,969
1989	4,896

Source: Department of Health annual census of medical and non-medical manpower.
Notes:

[1] Figures include Medical and Dental Locums and agency locums and Nursing and Midwifery agency staff, and Permanent paid Honorary staff.
Figures exclude Consultants and Senior Registrars in Non-Teaching District Health Authorities and Senior Registrars in Teaching District Health Authorities. These still have their contracts with the RHA.
On 1 April 1985 Family Practitioner Committees became independent employing authorities. Figures after that date therefore exclude FPC staff.

[2] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of reported cases of theft and fraud in the Tower Hamlets health authority in each year since 1979 showing *(a)* the total number of cases reported, *(b)* the total number of prosecutions and *(c)* the total number of convictions.

Mr. Dorrell: The Tower Hamlets health authority was established on 1 April 1982 following the abolition of area health authorities and consequently 1982-83 is the first year for which information is available.

The annual statement of losses included with the authority's annual accounts, records the number of reported cases in the category of loss of cash, equipment and property in stores and in use arising from theft, fraud, arson, neglect of duty or gross carelessness as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*
1982-83	33
1983-84	40
1984-85	28
1985-86	51
1986-87	84
1987-88	45
1988-89	25
1989-90	33

Health authorities are required to report to the Department annually all instances of alleged fraud and Tower Hamlets health authority has made no reports of fraud since its inception.

Information on the numbers of theft cases reported to the police, and of any resultant prosecutions and convictions is not collected centrally by the Department.

Nurses

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many enrolled nurses in the national health service have expressed interest in converting to state-registered nurse status; and how many conversion places from enrolled to state-registered nurse status have been offered for national health service staff;

(2) what steps he has taken to create and co-ordinate a national stratagem for enrolled nurse conversion courses; and what funding is available for the provision of enrolled nurse conversion courses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for regional health authorities, in consultation with employers, to plan for enrolled nurse conversion as part of their responsibility for identifying the level of demand for qualified nurses and for allocating appropriate budgets.

In addition, plans submitted to the Department for the implementation of Project 2000 nurse training are expected to contain firm proposals to increase the number of conversion places. Central funding has been made available to facilitate this.

The number of conversion courses approved by the English national board has increased from six in March 1985 to 241 in April 1991. Flexible methods of conversion have also been introduced which will help speed up the rate of conversion. The United Kingdom central council has changed its rules to allow enrolled nurses who have failed first level training three times to have three further attempts at passing their examinations.

Figures are not held centrally on the numbers of enrolled nurses who have expressed interest in converting to first level status, or on the number of conversion places which have been offered for national health service staff.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the effect of the placing of adverts for grade D nurses only on the right of other enrolled nurses to apply for posts in the national health service; and what provisions are included in Whitley council agreements governing the placing of adverts for D grade nurses only.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for health authorities to determine the appropriate grading for advertised nursing posts, in the light of the grading definitions agreed by the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council, and to decide what qualifications and experience are required. It is open to any nurse who meets those requirements to apply for such a post.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what effect the merging of nursing departments arising from implementation of Project 2000 has on restricting the number of nursing places available for conversion courses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no evidence to suggest that the merging of colleges of nursing has restricted the number of nursing places available to enrolled nurses for conversion courses.

Ashington Hospital

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions govern the requirement to employ a fully qualified head of clinical chemistry at relevant hospitals; what restrictions have been placed on clinical chemistry services in Ashington hospital in the absence of a suitably qualified person; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The qualification requirements for clinical scientists of all grades employed within the NHS are set out in advance letter (SP) 1/90, a copy of which is available in the Library. There are no restrictions placed on the clinical chemistry services at Ashington hospital in Northumberland. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Peter Carr, the chairman of Northumberland health authority, for details.

Abortions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on health authorities refusing to undertake a second national health service abortion for women who have a clinical need for them; if he will issue guidelines to health authorities on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Health authorities are not required to collect such information. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific case in mind, the district general manager of the relevant health authority should be able to provide details.

Tobacco Labelling

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in implementing the EC directive on the labelling of tobacco products.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have now made regulations under section 11 of the Consumer Protection Act and section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 which have been laid before Parliament today. They will come into effect on 1 January 1992 and will fully implement the EC directive on the labelling of tobacco products. The regulations were subject to consultation in draft and as a result I have made the health warnings on cigarette packets larger and clearer than originally proposed.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *63-64*.

Mr. Dorrell: The information readily available relates to the register of surveys maintained by the Central Statistical Office. Titles of surveys carried out since my earlier reply are as follows:

Cold Weather Publicity Evaluation 1991
Drugs Information 1991
Nursing: TV Creative Developments

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *54*.

Mr. Dorrell: The companies currently employed by, or on behalf of the Department's information division who are involved in the campaigns listed in my earlier reply are as follows:

Central Office of Information
FCO
Ogilvy and Mather
Laing Henry
Peter Cundall Associates
Media Systems
NML Presentations Ltd.
BMP DOB Needham
Barkers Human Resources Advertising Ltd.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what measures he will take in the light of his proposals for the future of the independent living fund, to ensure that adequate funds are made available to local authorities to meet the personal assistance needs of severely disabled people.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government are committed to providing adequate resources for all aspects of community care. Decisions on resources for 1993-94 will be taken during the 1992 public expenditure survey, in the light of discussions with the local authority associations.

Centre for Applied Microbiological Research

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the costs of the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research relate to *(a)* work carried out for, on, or on behalf of, Porton International Ltd. and related companies and *(b)* the public health laboratory service.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 July 1991]:* In the last financial year work for which Porton International was invoiced represented approximately 20 per cent. of the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research—CAMR—costs this year. In the same year the Public Health Laboratory Service bore approximately 40 per cent. of the Centre for Microbiological Research's costs. Funding from other Government Departments and grant-giving bodies comprised the remaining 40 per cent.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Operational Strategy

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of the operational strategy in each financial year from 1991-92 to 1998-99 *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of savings.

Miss Widdecombe: At 1988-89 prices the flow of gross costs and net of savings for the operational strategy, from 1991-92 to 1998-99, are currently estimated to be:

	Gross £ *million*	*Net of savings (net cash flow)* £ *million*
1991-92	224·4	−35·4
1992-93	122·9	107·9
1993-94	98·7	148·6
1994-95	92·5	161·9
1995-96	93·4	162·5
1996-97	94·6	161·3
1997-98	91·3	166·7
1998-99	98·6	197·2

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the costs and savings of the operational strategy *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of other savings for each financial year since its inception indicating the proportions and sources of the savings.

Miss Widdecombe: At 1988-89 prices the latest estimate of the costs and savings of the operational strategy *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of other savings (ie excluding staff savings) from 1985-86 to 1998-99 are in the table.

The proportions and sources of the three savings categories other than staff savings are as follows:

i. Contribution from DHSS Northern Ireland—4·3 per cent.
ii. Residual value of buildings and equipment—10·3 per cent.
iii. Non-salary cost savings—85·4 per cent.

£ million

	Costs		Savings	
	(a) Gross	(b) net of savings other than staff savings	(a) Gross	(b) Net of other savings (i.e. = Staff savings
1985-86	21·5	21·5	0·0	0·0
1986-87	59·4	58·5	16·5	15·7
1987-88	95·1	91·2	28·4	24·5
1988-89	150·4	128·6	66·3	44·6
1989-90	243·2	203·6	82·4	42·8
1990-91	269·1	243·2	106·7	80·8
1991-92	224·4	199·5	189·0	164·1
1992-93	122·9	91·5	230·8	199·4
1993-94	98·7	71·6	247·3	220·1
1994-95	92·5	65·8	254·4	227·7
1995-96	93·4	66·7	255·9	229·2
1996-97	94·6	67·8	255·9	229·2
1997-98	91·3	62·5	258·0	229·2
1998-99	98·6	32·0	295·8	229·2

Departmental Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each agency in his Department as an executive agency; and whether the cost was borne by his Department or the new agency.

Miss Widdecombe: Expenditure on events and publicity material surrounding the launch of each of the Department's executive agencies is a matter for each agency's chief executive. For the Benefits and Contributions Agencies, I refer the hon. Member to Mrs. Robinson's letter of 4 June and Miss Chant's letter of 30 May respectively to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), copies of which are in the Library. For the Information Technology Services Agency, Mr. John Kenworthy, the chief executive, will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and Public Information Office. There was no such expenditure in relation to the Resettlement Agency.

Any expenditure incurred was borne by the agency itself.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish details of the group bonus scheme in operation in each agency in his Department, including the cash amount per person awarded in the last year for which figures are available, and the conditions attached to its award.

Miss Widdecombe: Of the Department's four agencies, only the Information Technology Services Agency operates a group bonus scheme. The scheme operated in 1990-91. Payments, ranging from £50 to £1,500 have been made to a total of 155 staff at a total cost of £32,325. Awards were made for the achievement of specific objectives which produced improvements in service or cash efficiency savings. This pilot scheme is part of an Information Technology Services Agency group bonus scheme which also provides for total bonus payments of up to £400,000 to be paid in 1991-92 in respect of work done in 1990-91. The conditions are that the agency achieves efficiency savings, over and above those required in the Department's management plan, of at least four times the intended bonus payments, while maintaining agreed levels of service. No payment can be made until it is verified that the conditions have been fully met. Payments to any individual are subject to a maximum limit of £5,000.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appointments from the private sector have been made to each agency in his Department at grade 7 or above since its establishment as an agency; and if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable including the performance-related element.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not usual to reveal details of the pay arrangements of individual officers, other than chief executives of Next Steps agencies. Within that constraint, the information requested is as follows:

Information Technology Services Agency:

Three appointments have been made at grade 6, the salaries for which are all within the normal civil service range for the grade outside London. One appointment has been made at grade 5, the salary for which is above the normal civil service range for the grade.

Benefits Agency:

Three appointments have been made, one at grade 5 and two at grade 6. These appointments are within the normal civil service range for the grade within the London pay area.

No such appointments have been made in either the Contributions Agency or the Resettlement Agency.

Plawsworth Resettlement Unit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many places for men are currently provided at the Plawsworth resettlement unit; how many are occupied; and if he will list the numbers and locations of the replacement facilities for men within the Northern region.

Miss Widdecombe: The management of the resettlement unit replacement programme is a matter for Mr. Tony Ward, the chief executive of the Resettlement Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 66, if he will list the commencement date and duration of the publicity campaign to which he referred.

Miss Widdecombe: No commencement date has been agreed. The duration of the campaign is still a matter under consideration.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the advertising, promotional or

public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 66.

Miss Widdecombe: The Central Office of Information supervises our major advertising campaigns. Our appointed agency is currently BMP DDB Needham.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *140-41*.

Miss Widdecombe: Public opinion surveys carried out by the Department since 18 December 1990 are listed in the table.

1. Disability working allowance—Customer opinion of the assessment form proposed for use in repeat claims to DWA.
2. Attitudes towards personal pensions and other types of pension provision—Self-explanatory.
3. Customer perceptions of resettlement units—Views of the customers of resettlement units about the services provided.
4. National customer survey—Customer opinion of benefits delivered by local and central offices of the Benefits Agency.
5. Savings limit publicity—Evaluation survey.
6. Benefits Agency logo—Customer opinion of new agency logo.
7. Disability freeline evaluation—Second survey.
8. Family credit campaign—Continuing evaluation of campaign.
9. Customer market survey for the Contributions Agency—Customer opinion of service provided and future requirements.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the new child support agency is likely to come into operation, and where the administrative staff are to be located.

Mr. Jack: We plan to establish the Child Support Agency in early 1993—subject to the successful passage of the Child Support Bill. Most of the agency's staff will be located in six child support offices, each capable of housing some 500 staff. There they will do the bulk of processing and assessment work which does not require face to face contact with the customer. Negotiations are taking place which, if concluded satisfactorily, would site offices in Belfast, Birkenhead, the Black Country (Dudley area), Falkirk, Hastings and Plymouth, creating job opportunities for the local communities. Around one third of the agency's staff will be co-located in Benefit Agency offices to conduct interviews, visit customers, pursue local inquiries and offer advice and guidance about the agency's services.

Personal Pension Schemes

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members of personal pension schemes he expects to opt back into the state scheme within the next five years.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is not available in the precise form requested. Any estimate would be highly speculative given the large number of variable factors that individuals must consider before exercising their choice. However, the Government Actuary provided some forecast of trends in the personal pension market in his "Second Quinqennial Review of the Long Term Financial Estimates of the National Insurance Fund" published on 25 July 1990 (HC 582), a copy of which is in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the main training programmes and numbers involved in each of the last three years on offer to people in the *(a)* Sheffield TEC area, *(b)* Manchester TEC area, *(c)* Birmingham TEC area, *(d)* Leeds TEC area, *(e)* Glasgow LEC area and *(f)* in each of the London TEC areas; and how that is planned to change in the current financial year in the same format as his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on 15 May, *Official Report*, column *214*.

Mr. Jackson: Table A shows the main training programmes available in Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow area offices for each of the last three years of their operation and the average numbers involved in training.

Table B provides similar information for London region only. This is because the complex nature of programme and boundary changes compounded by the differing TEC operational dates invalidates a further division of data.

Table C shows the numbers planned in 1991-92 for the London region and for each of the other TEC areas by name. Plans for 1991-92 for Glasgow LEC is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to answer. The tables do not reflect numbers likely to be involved in employment action.

It is not possible for realistic comparisons to be made between operational TECs and former area offices. Because of boundary changes none of the TEC areas coincide with the former area office boundaries, and in addition there have been many changes to the programmes provided.

Table A

Sheffield

	1988-89[2]	*1989-90*[1 3]	*1990-91*[1 3]
Youth Training (YT)	8,456	5,491	3,009
Adult Training (AT)	[4]1,190	3,856	3,400
Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)	1,694	960	770

[1] Sheffield TEC became operational on 1 October 1990.
[2] 1988-89 relates to Sheffield and Rotherham areas.
[3] Figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 relate solely to the Sheffield TEC area.
[4] Adult Training for 1988-89 excludes Community Programme (CP).

Leeds

	1988-89[2]	*1989-90*[1 3]	*1990-91*[1 3]
Youth Training (YT)	8,739	4,881	3,500
Adult Training (AT)	[4]1,350	2,957	2,500
Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)	2,644	1,103	776

[1] Leeds TEC became operational on 15 October 1990.
[2] 1988-89 relates to the Leeds and North Yorkshire area.

[3] Figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 relate solely to the Leeds TEC area.
[4] Adult Training for 1988-89 excludes Community Programme (CP).

Manchester area office

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91[1]
Youth Training (YT)	N/A	6,508	5,438
Adult Training (AT)	[2]3,944	4,410	4,096
Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)	2,117	1,817	1,148

N/A = Not available.
[1] Manchester TEC became operational on 12 November 1990.
[2] Adult Training for 1988-89 excludes Community Programme (CP).
Note: The figures for YT and AT are based on the average number in training. The figures for EAS are based on the actual numbers joining.

Table A

Birmingham Area Office

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91[1]
Youth Training (YT)	8,579	7,929	5,417
Adult Training (AT)	[2]7,539	6,734	5,310
Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)	2,196	1,807	764

[1] Birmingham TEC became operational on 12 November 1990.
[2] Adult Training for 1988-89 excludes Community Programme (CP).

Table B

London Region

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Youth Training (YT)	20,941	20,700	20,609
Adult Training (AT)	[1]15,114	20,102	19,573
Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)	[2]—	8,999	7,047

[1] Adult Training for 1988-89 excludes Community Programme (CP).
[2] Not available.
Note: The figures for YT and AT are based on the average number in training. The figures for EAS are based on the actual numbers joining.

Table C
Average anticipated number of people on the main programmes in 1991-92

	Sheffield TEC	Leeds TEC	Manchester TEC	Birmingham TEC	London region
Youth training (YT)	2,788	3,200	6,525	6,398	21,316
Adult training (AT)	2,405	2,319	7,850	4,343	15,681
Enterprise allowance (EAS)	900	644	1,300	1,105	5,927

Note:
YT and AT data are anticipated in-training
EAS data are anticipated numbers joining

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will explain under what circumstances refugees are eligible to join employment training and youth training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department will shortly be advising TECs that for 1991-92 they will be able to allow refugees with indefinite or limited leave to remain in the United Kingdom access to employment training and youth training, subject to their meeting the normal eligibility criteria.

Dock Labour Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) to whom he has awarded the contract to carry out the manpower survey currently being undertaken by his Department into the manpower pre and post-abolition of the dock labour scheme; what is the full cost of the survey to his Department; and when he intends to publish the findings of the survey;

(2) which companies, trade unions and organisations it is intended to interview as part of the manpower survey with regard to the abolition of the dock labour scheme; and what part recently set up labour agencies will contribute to the survey;

(3) if he will list each of the terms of reference of the manpower survey with regard to the abolition of the dock labour scheme, and place in the Library a copy of the full remit;

(4) what scope the manpower survey has for assessing the incidence of the use of casual labour.

Mr. Forth: In conjunction with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, I have commissioned MDS-Transmodal and PIEDA plc to undertake a wide-ranging research project into the effects of the abolition of the dock labour scheme in 1989.

The terms of reference of the study, which is expected to cost £140,000 and to take about 15 months to complete, are:

"To assess the economic and social implications of the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme, by means of a review of existing sources and the collection of fresh data, including attitudinal information, both in the docks and in the wider port areas".

I am placing in the Library a copy of the invitation to tender and the research specification for the project, which includes an examination of the rationalisation of labour practices in the docks since the abolition of the scheme.

It will be for the consultants to decide which organisations to interview during this research project.

I would expect the main findings to be published shortly after the completion of the final report.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *83*.

Mr. Jackson: The Department's various research branches do not commission public opinion surveys as such. However, they do carry out research projects on a variety of employment-related issues which involve

surveys of individuals I list those research studies, commissioned or partly funded by the Employment Department Group (ED, Employment Service, and Health and Safety Executive), which have involved surveys of individuals carried out since 17 December 1990.

The British Social Attitudes Survey
Changes in Young People's Career Aspirations in the Late 1980s and Early 1990s
Claimants Who Experience Repeat Spells of Unemployment
Cohort Study of Claimants in Leicester
Employment and Handicap Follow-up
Literacy Issues in Recruitment and Selection for Unskilled Jobs
National Child Development Study—5th Stage
Region-Urban Unemployment in Manchester and Liverpool
Scottish Young People's Survey
Study of the Effects of Noise in the Workplace
Unemployment and Labour Market Flexibility
Youth Cohort Study—England and Wales

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the advertising promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 72.

Mr. Jackson: GGT Advertising is employed by the Department in connection with the career development loans and national training awards campaigns, referred to in the answer of 1 July.

Youth Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each of the 82 training and enterprise councils or employment service administration regions *(a)* the number of youth training places available, *(b)* the number of young people seeking a place and *(c)* the number of young people who left school last summer and are still without an offer of a youth training place.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* Information in the form requested is not available.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will *(a)* make a statement on the delivery of the youth training, *(b)* list the training and enterprise councils where the youth training is not being met and *(c)* list the representations he has received regarding the delivery of the youth training guarantee.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* The Government are fully committed to the YT guarantee and will see that it continues to be met. The guarantee of an offer of a suitable YT place applies to young people under 18 years who are not in full time education or a job and are seeking training under YT. The local delivery of the guarantee is a matter for TECs who must investigate and resolve any difficulties a young person within the guarantees group may experience in securing a YT place locally.

Young people in the guarantee group can seek to join or rejoin YT at any time and are entitled to continued reoffers while they remain within the group. At any time of the year there are therefore young people seeking to join YT. I am not aware of any TECs which are currently failing to meet the guarantee but I am aware that the choice and availability of placements with employers may be being affected by the current recession.

In these circumstances I strongly endorse the Construction Industry training board's recent call for its industry's employer bodies to promote YT to its members and deplore the decision by the Transport and General Workers unions to seek to reduce the number of opportunities available to young people.

Departmental records do not separately identify representations about the YT guarantee and this information could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of young people on bridging allowance for each of the employment scheme administration regions by providing a comparison of change and percentage change for the period January 1991 to May 1991 and January 1990 to May 1990, including the totals and the average.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline the procedure involved in ensuring training and enterprise councils deliver the youth training guarantee; and whether independent organisations are being used to monitor the performance of TECs in the delivery of the guarantee and to resolve any differences between the Department and the TECs regarding what constitutes the guarantee being met.

Mr. Jackson [holding answer 8 July 1991]: Provision for meeting the YT guarantee is made by TECs in their corporate and business plans which are agreed with the Department. TECs are obliged to use their best endeavour to meet the guarantees. Ensuring that TECs deliver the guarantee is therefore part of the overall contract management of TECs, which is the responsibility of the Department's regional directors. From time to time the Department employs independent consultants to examine and advise on various aspects of the Department's relationships with TECs or TEC performance. Monitoring the performance of TECs in relation to the YT guarantee or in other respects is however, a matter for the Department. Decisions as to what constitutes the guarantee being met are taken in the context of the Department's contract with TECs.

SCOTLAND

Bird Killing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to permit the killing of *(a)* cormorant, *(b)* goosander and *(c)* red-breasted merganser in (i) Scotland and (ii) the Tweed catchment, for each year between 1985 and 1991, to date, to prevent serious damage to fisheries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The details are as follows for the period 1985-91:

1. The number of licences granted for one or more species in Scotland were:

	Number
1985 (January-December)	59
1986 (April-June)	49
1987 (April-June)	44
1988 (February-April)	41
1989 (February-April)	37
1990 (February-April)	42
1991 (February-April)	50

2. The licences granted for one or more species in the River Tweed catchment were:

	Number
1985	2
1986	2
1987	2
1988	2
1989	1
1990	1
1991	1

The Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) has been consulted in advance of each shooting season. It was agreed with them and fishery interests in 1986 that any shooting under licence of these species should be restricted to April-June which coincided with the peak period of the smolt run on which the birds predated. In 1988 relevant interests agreed that shooting under licence should be restricted to the months of February-April on the ground that it would be less cruel to shoot birds outwith their breeding and nesting season.

It was decided in 1989 with the agreement of the NCC that the number of licences issued for the Tweed area should be restricted each year to one. This policy gives the licensees, the River Tweed Commissioners, overall responsibility for the control of birds causing damage to fisheries in the area.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of *(a)* cormorants, *(b)* goosander and *(c)* red-breasted merganser killed under licence in (i) Scotland and (ii) the Tweed catchment for each year between 1985 and 1991, to date, to prevent serious damage to fisheries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The details are as follows for the period 1985-91:

1. Birds reported killed under licence in Scotland.

	Cormorants	*Goosanders*	*Mergansers*
1985 (January-December)	500	224	451
1986 (April-June)	134	194	263
1987 (April-June)	195	175	274
1988 (February-April)	221	429	204
1989 (February-April)	112	383	247
1990 (February-April)	335	673	421
1991 (February-April)	381	504	235

2. Birds reported killed under licence in the River Tweed catchment

	Cormorants	*Goosanders*
1985	19	—
1986	36	—
1987	29	28
1988	50	258
1989	5	30
1990	17	264
1991	26	164

No application has been received to shoot mergansers in the Tweed catchment during this period.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amounts of hazardous waste imported into Great Britain for incineration through Scottish ports from the Irish Republic in each year since October 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office does not hold information on the amounts of hazardous waste imported from the Irish Republic through Scottish ports for disposal of incineration in England and Wales. No such waste has been imported for incineration in Scotland since the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988 came into force.

A96 Survey

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber on 27 June, *Official Report*, column *535*, whether he will state the date and time of day at which the survey of pedestrian/vehicle flows on the A96 at Fraser park, Nairn, was undertaken.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The survey was undertaken on Friday 16 November 1990 between 8 am and 5 pm following representations to Highland regional council from a Nairn district councillor in October 1990.

Health Visitors

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of health visitors employed by Greater Glasgow health board in April and November of each year beginning in April 1988.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available for the months requested. The number of health visitors employed by Greater Glasgow health board at 31 March and 30 September for the years requested is shown in the table:

	Whole-time equivalent	*Number*
March 1988	278·2	291
September 1988	289·0	301
March 1989	276·6	291
September 1989	299·3	313
March 1990	281·3	295
September 1990	265·7	279
March 1991	286·3	301

The figures exclude combined and triple duty nurses.

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland further to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *365*, if he will identify the national health service hospitals in Scotland where waste incinerators have difficulties in complying with current pollution control legislation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Two clinical waste incinerators are experiencing difficulties in complying with current pollution control legislation. These are located at the Western and Royal Infirmaries in Glasgow. Greater Glasgow health board is pursuing a vigorous course of action to deal with these difficulties.

Hospitals (Waste Disposal)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what special instructions have been issued for the adequate disposal of waste resulting from treatment of patients suffering from serious contagious diseases in Scottish national health service hospitals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A code of practice entitled "Hospital Infection Manual" has been issued to health boards. This code contains guidance on the disposal of waste resulting from treatment of patients suffering from serious contagious diseases in Scottish national health service hospitals.

Senile Dementia

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the health board areas the number of males and females suffering from senile dementia aged *(a)* up to 65 years, *(b)* 66 to 75 years, *(c)* 76 to 85 years and *(d)* over 86 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no nationally maintained register of persons suffering from senile dementia in Scotland. Figures are however collected on people with dementia who are resident in, or who have been discharged from, NHS hospitals; and these are set out in the following tables. I must emphasise that studies of the prevalence of dementia in the population over 65 indicate that these figures represent only a small proportion of the total number of people suffering from senile dementia.

Residents in Mental Illness Hospitals and Psychiatric Units as at 31.12.90 with an Admission Diagnosis of Senile Dementia (I.C.D. 290) by Health Board of Residence, Age and Sex.

	Male					*Female*				
	less than 65	*65-74*	*75-84*	*85+*	*Total*	*less than 65*	*65-74*	*75-84*	*85+*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	6	23	46	13	88	4	32	105	80	221
Ayr and Arran	5	23	34	12	74	9	29	68	42	148
Borders	1	7	22	1	31	3	9	52	40	104
Dumfries and Galloway	1	9	16	5	31	2	10	62	33	107
Fife	3	16	49	26	94	4	37	142	112	295
Forth Valley	3	5	24	9	41	8	26	66	71	171
Grampian	4	31	76	38	149	9	39	188	201	437
Greater Glasgow	17	77	154	54	302	31	93	408	330	862
Highland	2	7	30	12	51	4	13	42	41	100
Lanark	5	24	51	12	92	11	36	100	72	219
Lothian	12	28	103	33	176	17	63	243	210	533
Orkney	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	6	34	61	32	133	5	43	172	176	396
Western Isles	1	0	1	1	3	0	1	11	7	19
Scotland	66	285	667	248	1,266	107	431	1,659	1,415	3,612
Outwith/N.K	2	0	5	0	7	1	1	4	4	10
Total	68	285	672	248	1,273	108	432	1,663	1,419	3,622

Number of persons with Senile Dementia First[1] Discharged from Acute and Long-Stay Units in General Hospitals in 1989: By Age, Sex and Health Board of Residence.

	Males					Females				
	less than 65	65-74	75-84	85+	Total	less than 65	65-74	75-84	85+	Total
Argyll and Clyde	2	14	51	23	90	4	18	93	96	211
Ayr and Arran	3	13	30	16	62	3	17	69	60	149
Borders	0	2	14	7	23	0	2	13	22	37
Dumfries and Galloway	1	7	33	13	54	2	8	52	42	104
Fife	0	10	27	16	53	2	16	61	34	113
Forth Valley	1	9	26	10	46	4	4	55	50	113
Grampian	2	23	60	37	122	4	26	133	145	308
Greater Glasgow	6	33	82	34	155	7	28	187	199	421
Highland	5	13	34	11	63	1	11	50	45	107
Lanark	7	18	40	11	76	5	25	112	81	223
Lothian	10	39	109	44	202	7	34	265	264	570
Orkney	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	5	2	8
Shetland	0	1	2	2	5	0	0	7	4	11
Tayside	2	9	52	27	90	3	14	98	101	216
Western Isles	1	0	10	3	14	2	2	11	15	30

[1] Figures are based on linked data and exclude persons with an earlier discharge in the period 1985-1989.

Alcohol Abuse (Deaths)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths took place in national health service hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole with the principal diagnosis relating to alcohol abuse or misuse for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures requested are set out in the table. The causes of death included have been selected by the Registrar General as being the most relevant, based on current medical advice, and are shown below the table.

Deaths in National Health Service hospitals from selected causes, Strathclyde and Scotland, 1979-90

Year	Strathclyde	Scotland
1979	234	389
1980	233	371
1981	247	398
1982	225	400
1983	209	376
1984	200	364
1985	219	396
1986	209	343
1987	210	366
1988	227	384
1989	201	386
[1]1990	238	405

[1] Provisional.

Causes included:

ICD[1] Code	Cause
291	Alcoholic psychoses
303	Alcoholic dependence syndrome
305.0	Non-dependent abuse of alcohol
425.5	Alcoholic cardiomyopathy
571.0-571.3	Chronic liver diseases and cirrhosis, alcohol reported as a cause
571.4-571.9	Chronic liver diseases and cirrhosis, alcohol not specifically reported as a cause
E860	Accidental poisoning by alcohol not elsewhere classified

[1] International Classification of Diseases (9th Revision).

Fishing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what time scale has been set for the conclusion of the EFTA negotiations relating to fishing opportunities in the Community; and if he will give details;

(2) whether his Department has carried out an analysis of the impact on Scottish fishermen of any liberalisation of the trade in fish between Norway and the Community resulting from the EFTA discussions; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what discussions he has had with Scottish fishing interests in connection with the likely outcome and impact of the current European Free Trade Association negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is hoped that the current EC-EFTA negotiations will be concluded by the end of July.

These negotiations cover a wide range of commodities and the Government are taking careful account of the potential impact of any agreement on the industries affected. This of course includes the fishing industry and officials have discussed these negotiations with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

Further Education

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of male and female children aged 16 to 18 years in Inverclyde remained in full-time education for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information at this level of detail is not held centrally.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were registered unemployed in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow in each year since 1980, by electoral ward.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The available information, from June 1983, for electoral wards defined on the basis of 1984 ward boundaries, can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information if necessary.

Renaval Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the local programmes, in the Inverclyde district, which are to receive financial support by way of the European Community's Renaval programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Projects to be funded under the Strathclyde Renaval programme will be decided by a programme monitoring committee which will be established once the Commission approves the programme.

Employment Training

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of employment training placements for the last available financial year were in work places; and what percentage were in project-based schemes in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information for Scotland as a whole is set out in the table.

April 1990-March 1991

	Per cent.
Estimated percentage of Scottish Employment Training placements in workplaces with employers	19·6
Estimated percentage of Scottish Employment Training placements in project based schemes	40·0

The information sought is not available for areas within Scotland either in the form requested or for the precise areas stipulated. It is possible to disaggregate information only by former Training Agency area office areas and to provide figures only as a percentage of the Scottish total.

Information on this basis for 1990-91 for the Training Agency area office areas which encompass Inverclyde district and Strathclyde region is set out in the table.

April 1990-March 1991

Per cent.

	Renfrew, Dumbarton and Argyll	*Glasgow City*	*Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway*	*Lanarkshire*
Estimated percentage of Scottish Employment Training placements in workplaces with employers, located in Training Agency area office areas	9·4	18·7	12·5	8·0
Estimated percentage of Scottish Employment Training placements in project based schemes, located in Training Agency area office areas	7·7	18·2	13·2	9·7

River Clyde (Discharges)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases there have been of unauthorised discharges into the River Clyde in the last 10 years; of these how many led to court proceedings and convictions; and what was the average fine imposed against such miscreants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Some information on these matters is contained in the annual reports of the Clyde River Purification Board, copies of which are in the Library. More detailed information, however, is held only by the board and I have asked it to write to the hon. Member.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *91*.

Mr. Lang: I shall place a list of surveys in the Library as soon as possible.

Playgroups

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps he has taken to determine the financial impact of the imposition of registration and inspection fees on non-profit-making play groups, mother and toddler groups and under-fives groups in Scotland;

(2) whether he will bring forward proposals to exempt non-profit-making play groups, mother and toddler groups and under-fives groups from registration and inspection fees under section 10 of the Children Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: When the Children Act 1989 comes into force on 14 October, fees payable by applicants for registration will be prescribed by regulations, as will annual inspection fees. The Government have not yet decided on the level of fees. We fully recognise the value to children and their families of the services provided by local playgroups, often within very tight budgets. We shall take this into account when we come to prescribe fees.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of farms, the numbers of hectares and the average area per farm in hectares which are in the set-aside scheme in each region in 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table:

[1] *Region*	*Number of Farms*	*Area set aside (ha)*	*Average area/farm (ha)*
Borders	37	2,261	61·1
Central	19	709	37·3
Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles[2]	9	104	11·6
Fife	20	1,269	63·5
Grampian	337	10,796	32·0
Highland	50	2,240	44·8
Lothian	18	1,327	73·7
Strathclyde	37	665	18·0
Tayside	90	3,662	40·7
Scotland	617	23,033	37·3

[1] Information is provisional pending the processing of the 1990-91 set-aside claims.
[2] Data for these regions have been grouped together for reasons of confidentiality.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the uptake of the set-aside scheme in *(a)* the number of farms and *(b)* the area of land set aside in hectares for 1990-91.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In 1989-90, the second year of the set-aside scheme, a cumulative total of 498 farms in Scotland set aside 18,840 hectares of land. This increased in 1990-91, to 617 farms setting aside 23,033 hectares.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Compensation)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 13 June, *Official Report*, column *653*, when the hon. Member for Linlithgow may expect a letter on his assessment of the size and number of other estates in a similar position to Glenlochay.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I expect to be in a position to write to the hon. Member very shortly, once some necessary information has been obtained from the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland.

Playgroups

Mr. Wray: To asks the Secretary of State for Scotland whether, in implementing section 10 of the Children Act 1989, he will make sure that no fees for registration and inspection are charged to non-profit playgroups with charitable status.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Playgroups provide a valuable service for children and their families, often within very tight budgets. In fixing the fees for registration and inspection, which will be prescribed by regulations under the Children Act 1989, we shall take account of the position of playgroups.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mortgage Repossessions

3. **Mr. Kilfedder:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of mortgage repossessions in Northern Ireland in 1990.

Mr. Needham: Repossessions statistics are not provided by the mortgage lending institutions on a regional basis. National totals are published by the Council of Mortgage Lenders in its GB quarterly publication "Housing Finance".

Constitution

13. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland to discuss constitutional matters.

Mr. Brooke: On Wednesday 3 July.

Anglo-Irish Conference

15. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when Ministers from the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland Governments will next meet within the context of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy).

Cross-border Co-operation

16. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has recently made to, or received from, the Government of the Republic of Ireland regarding co-operation in security matters.

24. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cross-border security co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic.

Dr. Mawhinney: At the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental conference on 26 April measures to enhance security co-operation were discussed in detail with Irish Ministers. At that meeting, both Governments reaffirmed their commitment to continue to work together to counter terrorist violence. My right hon. Friend intends to return to those discussions at the next meeting of the conference.

Armagh Four

17. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received concerning the imprisonment of Winston Allen, Noel Bell, James Hegan and Neil Latimer, known as the Armagh Four; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend has, in addition to a petition and numerous letters from the public, received representations from Members, Lords, churchmen and others about the case. These have generally sought to encourage him to exercise his discretionary power to refer the case back to the Court of Appeal, which he would do only if some new evidence or consideration of substance is produced.

Rail Services

18. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the disruption of rail services in Northern Ireland arising from both acts and threats of terrorism.

Mr. Needham: In spite of acts and threats of terrorism, Northern Ireland Railways continues to provide an important service to people on both sides of the border. Those who seek to disrupt it, not only cause needless hardship and inconvenience but put lives at risk.

Political Talks

19. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the response to his latest political initiative.

23. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the talks between the Northern Ireland political parties on the future of the Province.

26. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position regarding the current talks over political progress in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

NHS Trusts

20. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to introduce national health service trusts into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Department of Health and Social Services is consulting on an application from the Royal group of hospitals for health and social services trust status which, if successful, would result in the creation of a trust. Varying degrees of interest in trusts status have been expressed by other hospitals.

Electricity Privatisation

21. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has finalised the date for the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Subject to the necessary legislation being approved by Parliament, the Government hope to be in a position to complete the sale of the power stations in spring 1992, and aims to float the remainder of NIE's business on the stock exchange later in the year.

Home Ownership

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the level of home ownership in Northern Ireland since 1979.

Mr. Needham: The growth in home ownership in Northern Ireland since 1979 has been a noted success. In that year the total number of owner-occupied properties was 256,500 which represented 52 per cent. of the total housing stock. By the end of 1990 this figure had risen to 347,500 or 66 per cent.

Conservative Party

25. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to meet representatives of the Northern Ireland Conservative party to discuss the talks on the future of the Province; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I shall be meeting representatives of the Conservative party constituency associations in Northern Ireland in the near future for a general exchange of views on Government policy.

Terrorism

27. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has had about the prevention of terrorism; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government regularly receive and consider representations from a wide range of bodies and individuals about the prevention of terrorism.

The Government remain determined to defeat terrorism through the even-handed and energetic enforcement of the rule of law. The RUC, supported by the Army, continue to make progress to this end, in the knowledge that Government will provide them with adequate resources, including legal resources. The Emergency Provisions (N.I.) Act, which received its Royal Assent on 27 June, is a further example of this support.

However, the prevention of terrorism will not be achieved by security measures alone. The Government are also working, therefore, to implement effective measures in the political, social and economic fields.

Stevens Inquiry

28. **Mr. Maginnis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost of the Stevens inquiry to date; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand that up to 3 July the cost of the Stevens inquiry has been £868,480.

Mr. John Stevens, the deputy chief constable of Cambridgeshire, at the request of the chief constable of the RUC, conducted an inquiry into allegations of collusion between members of the security forces in Northern Ireland and loyalist paramilitaries. After a most thorough examination, he presented his report to the Chief Constable on 5 April 1990. Action on the report's conclusions and recommendations is being taken by the police and Army.

Publications

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all publications relating to Northern Ireland ordered to be stocked by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, in each of the last five years; the total cost of each publication; and who was awarded the printing contract.

Mr. Maples: I have been asked to reply.

A search of HMSO's title database shows the following number of publications with Northern Ireland or Ulster in the bibliographic details:

Year of Publication	*Number*
1986	512
1987	653
1988	642
1989	765
1990	699

This does not, of course, represent the totality of HMSO publications that may relate to Northern Ireland in some way but it would involve disproportionate cost to examine each of the over 40,000 new items published by HMSO over this period for specific relevance.

Similarly, the other details requested could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Colin Wallace

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a response to the most recent representations he has received about the case of Colin Wallace.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend replied to a letter from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on 5 July.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of people employed in shipbuilding and shiprepair in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: At 31 May 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, some 2,458 people were employed in shipbuilding and shiprepair in Northern Ireland.

Fair Employment

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that draft copies of the Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991 are available to the House when it considers the draft Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

Mr. Needham: I have arranged for copies of the draft Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991 to be placed in the Library to facilitate debate on the Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

Health and Social Services Councils

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has given consideration to the extent to which funding will be required for health and social services councils, in order that they may fulfil their functions and meet the requirements to reflect the interests of the consumer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Yes. I recently met the four health and social services council chairmen to discuss finance and asked them to draw up budgets for the current financial year and for 1992-93, taking account of advice from the health and social services boards and the Department of Health and Social Services. I have undertaken that the councils will be adequately funded to represent the interests of the public in the health and personal social services in their areas.

DEFENCE

Challenger 2 Tank

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has yet placed the production contract with Vickers for the Challenger 2 main battle tank.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes. Contractual negotiations have been successfully concluded between my Department and Vickers and the contract for two regiments of Challenger 2 main battle tanks was placed on Friday 28 June.

Attack Helicopter

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the procurement of a new attack helicopter for the Army.

Mr. Alan Clark: Following our withdrawal from the collaborative A129-LAH studies, we have decided that the attack and armed reconnaissance roles would be best met by separate helicopters. We plan to replace the Lynx in the anti-tank role by an off-the-shelf purchase towards the end of the decade. To this end, we propose to issue a request for proposals against a cardinal points specification in the spring of 1992. The requirement for an armed reconnaissance helicopter will be considered separately.

RAF Bases

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the former RAF bases which have closed since 1987 *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since 1987 the former RAF bases at Barnwood, Bawdsey, Binbrook, Bishops Court, Hendon and North Coates in the United Kingdom have closed. There have been no overseas base closures in this period. We have also announced our plans for the full or partial closure of RAF Abingdon, RAF Biggin Hill, RAF Church Fenton, RAF Ely, RAF Halton, RAF Hullavington and RAF West Raynham in the United Kingdom, as well as the cessation of flying at RAF Gutersloh and RAF Wildenrath in Germany.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by location the RAF bases in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following is a list of active bases where there is a permanent RAF presence:

(a) In the United Kingdom

RAF Abingdon
RAF Aldergrove
RAF Amport House
RAF Ash
RAF Bampton Castle
RAF Benbecula
RAF Benson
RAF Bentley Priory
RAF Biggin Hill
RAF Boddington
RAF Boulmer
RAF Bracknell
RAF Brampton
RAF Brawdy
RAF Brize Norton
RAF Buchan
RAF Cardington
RAF Carlisle
RAF Catterick
RAF Chilmark
RAF Chivenor
RAF Church Fenton
RAF Coltishall
RAF Coningsby
RAF Cosford
RAF Cottesmore
RAF Cowden
RAF Cranwell
RAF Digby
RAF Ely
RAF Finningley
RAF Flyingdales
RAF Halton
RAF Harrogate
RAF Headley Court
RAF Henlow
RAF Hereford
RAF High Wycombe
RAF Holbeach
RAF Honington
RAF Hullavington
RAF Innsworth
RAF Jurby Head
RAF Kemble
RAF Kinloss

RAF Leeming
RAF Leuchars
RAF Lindholme
RAF Linton-on-Ouse
RAF Locking
RAF Lossiemouth
RAF Lyneham
RAF Machrihanish
RAF Manston
RAF Marham
RAF Mount Batten
RAF Neatishead
RAF Newton
RAF North Luffenham
RAF Northolt
RAF Oakhanger
RAF Odiham
RAF Pembrey Sands
RAF Pitreavie Castle
RAF Portreath
RAF Quedgeley
RAF Rosehearty
RAF Rudloe Manor
RAF St. Athan
RAF St. Mawgan
RAF Saxa Vord
RAF Scampton
RAF Sealand
RAF Shawbury
RAF Spadeadam
RAF Stafford
RAF Stanbridge
RAF Stanmore Park
RAF Staxton Wold
RAF Stornoway
RAF Swanton Morley
RAF Swinderby
RAF Tain
RAF Turnhouse
RAF Upavon
RAF Uxbridge
RAF Valley
RAF Waddington
RAF Wainfleet
RAF Wattisham
RAF Watton
RAF West Drayton
RAF West Raynham
RAF Wittering
RAF Woodvale
RAF Wroughton
RAF Wyton

(b) overseas

RAF Akrotiri
RAF Ascension Island
RAF Belize
RAF Bruggen
RAF Gatow
RAF Gibraltar
RAF Gutersloh
RAF Laarbruch
RAF Mount Pleasant
RAF Nordhorn
RAF Rhendahlen
RAF Sek Kong
RAF Troodos
RAF Wegberg
RAF Wildenrath

Manning Levels

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish with the Statement on the Defence Estimates the current and planned totals for *(a)* three-star posts, *(b)* two-star posts and *(c)* one-star posts, distinguishing military and civil posts, and distinguishing for military posts between command and staff appointments and for civilian posts between scientific-engineering posts and administrative ones.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Much work still has to be done to establish the future requirement for starred posts. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) on 4 July, at column *213*, it is planned to reduce the uniformed and civilian top structure in headquarters by about 20 per cent. Related reductions will be made throughout the services and among civilian staff. The current number of posts, and the corresponding data for 1990, is as follows. The figures do not include officers undergoing training, on handovers or on terminal leave.

	1 April 1990		*1 April 1991*	
	Command	*Staff*	*Command*	*Staff*
Royal Navy				
Vice Admiral	9	3	9	3
Rear Admiral	18	17	17	17
Commodore/Senior Captain	36	50	36	51
Royal Marines				
Lt. General	1	0	1	2
Major General	1	2	1	2
Brigadier/Colonel	2	6	2	7
Army				
Lt. General	5	4	6	4
Major General	22	37	22	39
Brigadier	97	110	99	107
Royal Air Force				
Air Marshal	5	4	5	5
Air Vice Marshal	9	28	10	28
Air Commodore	24	86	22	82
Civilian	*Admin.*	*Sc/Eng.*	*Admin.*	*Sc/Eng.*
Grade 2	6	5	6	4
Grade 3	30	28	29	25
Grade 4	12	12	12	9
Grade 5	133	126	130	120

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current position with regard to the closure of International Military Services Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: It has been decided that International Military Services Limited is to cease trading on 31 July 1991, but the company will remain in being until all its current obligations are discharged.

Civil Servants

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 4 July to the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), (1) whether he has any plans to offer civil servants premature voluntary release packages as part of his plans to reduce the number of MOD civil service staff;

(2) what are the grades of civil service jobs that are due to be eliminated, and the numbers in each grade;

(3) whether he has plans to make compulsory redeployments of MOD civil servants;

(4) what plans he has to make MOD civil servants redundant; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what discussions he has had with civil service trade unions regarding his planned reductions in the size of the civil service;

(6) what agreements have been reached with civil service trade unions regarding his planned reductions in the size of the civil service;

(7) what plans he has to allow MOD civil servants to transfer to other areas of the civil service.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 4 July representatives of the departmental trades unions were informed about our plans for a reduction in the size of the MOD headquarters. The trade unions were invited to comment on the plans in accordance with agreed consultative procedures. They are also being consulted about reductions in civilian staff outside headquarters under "Options for Change", as our plans develop. It is intended to bring about the required reduction in numbers by a variety of means, including a reduction in recruitment, natural wastage, transfer to other Government Departments if possible, and voluntary early retirement. Where necessary, civil servants in mobile grades will be expected to honour their mobility obligation. Everything possible will be done to avoid compulsory redundancy, though this may not be possible for all grades. Further work is continuing to identify the precise numbers and grades affected.

Conventional Forces in Europe

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been made regarding the method and timing of reductions in British treaty-limited items of military equipment that are due to take place as part of the CFE treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Reduction of United Kingdom treaty-limited equipment—tanks and armoured combat vehicles—will be carried out by explosive demolition, as described in the protocol on reduction. The necessary reductions will be completed within 40 months of the treaty coming into force, as specified in the treaty.

Service Redundancies

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to extend the 28-day training period for personnel leaving the services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are reviewing future resettlement provision. I cannot anticipate the outcome of the review.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *136*, to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), if he will provide further details on the nature of the advice and counselling given to those leaving the services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Personnel may seek advice from their units resettlement or education officers at any time during their careers, and there is also provision for more formal interviews during the last 18 months of service. The guidance provided in these ways is intended to inform personnel about the opportunities and problems likely to be encountered in making the transition to civilian life and, more specifically, about the range of resettlement briefings and training options that are available. The briefings are organised on a collective basis at various locations, and cover such matters as applying for a job; specific civilian careers; life in different regions; and other facets of civilian life, such as purchasing a home and managing one's finances. Such briefings last one or two days, and personnel may attend a number of them, in addition to the 28-day training period.

RAF Closures

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the strategic rationale behind the disbandment of No. 16, No. 58 and No 63 squadrons RAF Regiment;

(2) what is the strategic rationale behind the closure of *(a)* RAF Hullavington, *(b)* No. 7 flying training school at RAF Church Fenton and *(c)* RAF Abingdon.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on 2 July, at column *138*, and to the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991".

Operation Granby (Injuries)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of service personnel being treated for physical injuries or illnesses resulting either wholly or partially from Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have had some form of treatment for physical injuries or illnesses resulting either wholly or partially from Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraph 7 of the box entitled "Medical Support" at page 19 of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991"—Cm. 1559-1.

Racial Harassment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *133*, what action has been taken as a result of the complaints of racial harassment recorded in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All complaints of racial harassment which came to the attention of Ministry of Defence headquarters during the years 1988, 1989, 1990 and, to date, in 1991 were investigated and the results were as follows:

	Complaints substantiated	*Punishment*	*Complaints unsubstantiated*
1988	1	[1]2 offenders fined	[2]3
1989	1	[1]1 offender fined	3
1990	—	—	[3]3
[4]1991	—	—	1

[1] All fined for common assault.
[2] Includes 2 complaints subsequently withdrawn.
[3] Includes 1 complaint subsequently withdrawn.
[4] 1991 to date.

Recruitment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown by region of recruiting figures to the British Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Regiments

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is currently held centrally regarding *(a)* the running costs and *(b)* the operational effectiveness of individual Army regiments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None; there is no requirement for information at this level of detail to be held centrally.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the regiments in the Army and where they are currently serving.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following table lists all Regular Army combat arm major units and their current base locations.

Title	*Location*
Infantry—Regular battalions	
1 Grenadier Guards	Munster
2 Grenadier Guards	Caterham
1 Coldstream Guards	Wellington Barracks
2 Coldstream Guards	Chelsea
1 Scots Guards	Hohne
2 Scots Guards	Hounslow
1 Irish Guards	Berlin
1 Welsh Guards	Pirbright
1 The Royal Scots	Werl
1 The Royal Highland Fusiliers	Oakington
1 The King's Own Scottish Borderers	Edinburgh
1 The Black Watch	Ballykinler
1 Queen's Own Highlanders	Munster
1 The Gordon Highlanders	Fort George
1 The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	Minden
1 The Queen's Regiment	Minden
2 The Queen's Regiment	Canterbury
3 The Queen's Regiment	Cyprus
1 The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	Tidworth
2 The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	Bulford
3 The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	Hemer
1 The Royal Anglian Regiment	Colchester
2 The Royal Anglian Regiment	Celle
3 The Royal Anglian Regiment	Londonderry
1 The King's Own Royal Border Regiment	Colchester
1 The King's Regiment	Ballykelly
1 The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire	Osnabruck
1 The Green Howards	Catterick
1 The Royal Irish Rangers	Warminster
2 The Royal Irish Rangers	Lemgo
1 The Queen's Lancashire Regiment	Weeton
1 The Duke of Wellington's Regiment	Tern Hill
1 The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment	Cyprus
1 The Royal Hampshire Regiment	Colchester
1 Staffordshire Regiment	Fallingbostel
1 The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment	Catterick
1 The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment	Bulford
1 The Cheshire Regiment	Chester
1 The Royal Welsh Fusiliers	Berlin
1 The Royal Regiment of Wales	Hong Kong
1 The Gloucestershire Regiment	Catterick
1 The Light Infantry	Berlin
2 The Light Infantry	Tidworth
3 The Light Infantry	Paderborn
1 The Royal Green Jackets	Osnabruck
2 The Royal Green Jackets	Omagh
3 The Royal Green Jackets	Dover
1 The Parachute Regiment	Hollywood
2 The Parachute Regiment	Aldershot
3 The Parachute Regiment	Aldershot
1 2nd King Edward VIIs Own Gurkha Rifles	Hong Kong
2 2nd King Edward VIIs Own Gurkha Rifles	Brunei
6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles	Hong Kong
7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles	Church Crookham
10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles	Hong Kong
Royal Armoured Corps Regular Regiments	
The Life Guards	Sennelager
The Blues and Royals	Windsor
1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards	Tidworth
The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards	Fallinbostel
4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards	Detmold
5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards	Paderborn
The Queen's Own Hussars	Hohne
The Queen's Royal Irish Hussars	Fallingbostel
9th/12th Royal Lancers	Wimbish
The Royal Hussars	Munster
13th/18th Royal Hussars	Wolfenbottel
14th/20th King's Hussars	Munster
15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars	Detmold
16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers	Herford
17th/21st Lancers	Tidworth
1 Royal Tank Regiment	Hildesheim
2 Royal Tank Regiment	Bovington/Catterick
3 Royal Tank Regiment	Hemer
4 Royal Tank Regiment	Osnabruck
Royal Artillery Regiments	
1 Royal Horse Artillery	Hohne
3 Royal Horse Artillery	Colchester
7 Royal Horse Artillery	Aldershot
2 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Munster
4 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Osnabruck
5 Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery	Dortmund
12 Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	Dortmund
14 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Larkhill
16 Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	Kirton Lindsey

Title	Location
19 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Topcliffe
22 Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	Dortmund
26 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Gutersloh
27 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Dortmund
29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery	Plymouth/Arbroath
32 Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery	Dortmund
39 Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery	Sennelager
40 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Hohne
45 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Paderborn
47 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Thorney Island
49 Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Lippstadt
50 Missile Regiment Royal Artillery	Menden
Royal Engineer Regiments	
21 Engineer Regiment	Nienburg
22 Engineer Regiment	Tidworth
23 Engineer Regiment	Osnabruck
25 Engineer Regiment	Osnabruck
26 Engineer Regiment	Iserlohn
28 Amphibious Engineer Regiment	Hameln
32 Armoured Engineer Regiment	Munsterlager
33 (EOD) Regiment	Chattenden
35 Engineer Regiment	Hameln
36 Engineer Regiment	Maidstone
38 Engineer Regiment	Ripon
39 Engineer Regiment	Waterbeach
The Queen's Gurkha Engineers	Hong Kong
Army Air Corps	
1 Regiment Army Air Corps	Hildesheim
3 Regiment Army Air Corps	Soest
4 Regiment Army Air Corps	Detmold
7 Regiment Army Air Corps	Netheravon
9 Regiment Army Air Corps	Topcliffe
Special Air Service Regiment	
22nd Regiment Special Air Service	

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the release of de-classified information on the safeguarding of nuclear weapons against *(a)* theft and *(b)* unauthorised use to his counterparts in other countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Any such case would be considered on its merits giving due regard to United Kingdom national interests and international obligations.

MOD Land

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has established targets for the sale of surplus MOD property and land either *(a)* to housing associations or *(b)* on the open market.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

RAF Bentwaters and Woodbridge

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* the relevant local authorities and *(b)* his United States counterpart regarding the future employment and housing needs of civil service personnel employed at RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has discussed various issues arising from the United States withdrawal from RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge with Suffolk county council and Suffolk coastal district council.

Army Resettlement

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of staff in the Army resettlement employment liaison cell, the titles and grades of staff attached to the cell and its current average annual running cost.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Army resettlement employment liaison cell comprises one lieutenant colonel, who is the senior employment liaison officer, assisted by one major, one executive officer and two administrative assistants. Annual running costs are of the order of £200,000.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what amount of funding has been provided to the Officers Association and the Regular Forces Employment Association in each year since 1970.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The funding provided to the Officers' Association and the Regular Forces Employment Association in each year since 1970 was as follows:

Year	Officers' Association	Regular Forces Employment Association
	£	£
1970-71	27,500	15,100
1971-72	27,500	18,700
1972-73	27,800	38,800
1973-74	40,866	43,500
1974-75	44,538	52,780
1975-76	47,400	76,000
1976-77	63,960	91,000
1977-78	72,098	98,700
1978-79	86,214	146,500
1979-80	65,694	193,800
1980-81	72,379	241,000
1981-82	88,694	263,600
1982-83	96,331	323,600
1983-84	97,261	359,400
1984-85	103,748	399,400
1985-86	111,841	415,800
1986-87	128,000	431,140
1987-88	132,800	453,400
1988-89	117,000	496,100
1989-90	141,120	523,600
1990-91	155,400	557,600
[1]1991-92	200,700	605,300

[1] Forecast.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to increase *(a)* the size of the Army resettlement employment liaison cell and *(b)* the level of funding provided to the Officers Association and the Regular Forces Employment Association.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The size of the Army resettlement employment liaison cell, which is part of the tri-service resettlement organisation employment unit, and the level of MOD grant to the Officers Association and the Regular Forces Employment Association are kept under review in the light of the demand on their services. The MOD will be discussing with both associations the level of funding necessary in the light of "Options for Change".

RAF Hullavington

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has had with North Wiltshire district council regarding the future employment and housing needs of MOD personnel employed or stationed at RAF Hullavington and the barracks at Colerne;

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* private firms regarding the future of the barracks at Colerne and RAF Hullavington.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. Discussions will be held with North Wiltshire district council regarding the future of the sites.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with North Wiltshire district council regarding planning permission.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Discussions are held with local authorities as required on planning matters relating to MOD sites.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *5-7*.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The opinion poll surveys conducted by, for or on behalf of the Ministry of Defence since December 1990 are as follows:

Subject	*Date*
Public Attitudes to Defence	Annual
RAF Statement of Equality Research	1991
Research at Welbeck College on recruitment to the Army	1991
RAF—Strategic Research	1991
Target	
Market Exploratory Research (Navy)	1991

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *82*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Royal Navy

Production of a television recruiting advertisement and television advertising campaign.—Young and Rubican Ltd. Advertising Agency to be responsible for television advertising campaign. Contract not yet placed for television recruiting advertising.

Army

Production of a television/cinema recruiting advertising and television/cinema advertising campaign. Press campaign in support of the above.—Advertisement produced by Sid Roberson Films. Delaney, Fletcher, Slaymaker, Delaney & Bozell Advertising Agency responsible for advertising campaign.

Territorial Army

1. A combined TV/Press recruitment campaign highlighting the range of weekend activities in the Territorial Army.—Advertisement produced by Ridley Scott Associates. Delaney, Fletcher, Slaymaker, Delaney & Bozell Advertising Agency to be responsible for advertising campaign.

2. A press campaign to recruit specialist personnel.—Delaney, Fletcher, Slaymaker, Delaney & Bozell Advertising Agency.

Purcell Miller Tritton responsible for production of posters in support of 1 and 2 above.

Tri-Service

1. Press campaign to thank employers for releasing Volunteer Reserve Forces personnel for service during the Gulf crisis.—Young and Rubican Ltd. Advertising Agency.

2. Campaign to increase public awareness of Volunteer Reserve Forces and employers' support for them.—Young and Rubican Ltd. Advertising Agency.

Gurkhas and RAF Regiment

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many infantry battalions or manpower equivalent are contained within the establishment of the Brigade of Gurkhas and the RAF Regiment;

(2) how many British infantry battalions equate, in terms of manpower, to the Brigade of Gurkhas and the RAF Regiment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are five infantry battalions in the brigade of Gurkhas together with supporting units. United Kingdom infantry battalions vary in size according to role and differences in peace and war establishments. The RAF Regiment is not structured on the basis of battalions. It is not meaningful, therefore, to draw comparisons in this way.

Army

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the men of the Brigade of Gurkhas and RAF Regiment meet his infantry criteria of universality of posting both in terms of geographic location and type of duty, including armoured formations;

(2) what assessment he has made of the quality of soldiering now being provided in the Household Division, Light Division and the Parachute Regiment;

(3) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the British Army is able to meet its present role and tasks;

(4) how many battalion year tasks will be relinquished as a result of his recent assessment of the new military threat now facing the United Kingdom; and if he will list them;

(5) what assessment he has made of whether the training of the officers and men of the Household Division, Light Division and the Parachute Regiment currently fit them to meet his criteria of universality in terms of geographic location and role, including armoured formations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to make a statement on the restructuring of the Army before the House rises for the summer recess. It would not be appropriate to comment on these matters until then.

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secetary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on regimental restructuring in the Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said in the House on 2 July, he hopes to make a statement on Army restructuring before the summer recess.

Infantry

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the contribution of the infantry to the modern hi-tech battlefield.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has a vital contribution to make.

Support Services

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secetary of State for Defence if he will list the current peace-time establishments, by rank of the medical, catering and ordnance support arms of each of the three services and their annual cost in terms of salary.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secetary of State for Defence what is, in his reorganisation of the armed forces, his policy on retention by each of the three armed-forces of its own individual medical (including dental), communications, mechanical, catering and ordnance supporting arms.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In looking for savings in support commensurate with those in the front line, we are examining the scope for rationalisation in all areas. The services will retain individual supporting arms where it is operationally necessary and cost-effective to do so.

Type 2075 Sonar Programme

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations influenced his decision to terminate the contract for the development of the type 2075 integrated sonar suite.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. and learned Member to my answer of 17 June to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) at column *67*.

Type 2076 Sonar Programme

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the type 2076 sonar programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Sonar 2076 is the programme to update the sonar suites of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar class submarines. This programme will ensure that these submarines remain effective and capable throughout their lifespan. We have recently awarded contracts for the project definition phase of the programme to Marconi Underwater Systems Limited and Ferranti-Thomson Sonar Systems Ltd.

Communications Project Definition Studies

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the integrated external and internal communications project definition studies.

Mr. Alan Clark: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman shortly.

Light Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future requirements of the Army for light armoured vehicles.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are continuing to review our requirement for light armoured vehicles as part of the "Options for Change" process.

RAF Squadrons

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the operational squadrons in the Royal Air Force and where they are currently stationed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The front-line squadrons of the RAF as of 1 April 1991 are listed at Annex D to the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991" published on 9 July. Their peacetime locations as of the same date are as follows:

			Location
Strike/Attack			
Tornado GR1	9	Sqn	RAF Bruggen
	14	Sqn	RAF Bruggen
	15	Sqn	RAF Laarbruch
	16	Sqn	RAF Laarbruch
	17	Sqn	RAF Bruggen
	20	Sqn	RAF Laarbruch
	27	Sqn	RAF Marham
	31	Sqn	RAF Bruggen
	617	Sqn	RAF Marham
Buccaneer	12	Sqn	RAF Lossiemouth
	208	Sqn	RAF Lossiemouth
Offensive Support			
Harrier	1	Sqn	RAF Wittering
	3	Sqn	RAF Gutersloh
	4	Sqn	RAF Gutersloh
Jaguar	6	Sqn	RAF Coltishall
	54	Sqn	RAF Coltishall
Maritime Patrol			
Nimrod MR	42	Sqn	RAF St. Mawgan

			Location
	120	Sqn	RAF Kinloss
	201	Sqn	RAF Kinloss
	206	Sqn	RAF Kinloss
Reconnaissance			
Jaguar	41	Sqn	RAF Coltishall
Tornado GR1a	2	Sqn	RAF Laarbruch
	13	Sqn	RAF Honington
Nimrod R	51	Sqn	RAF Wyton
Canberra PR9	1	PRU	RAF Wyton
Air Defence			
Tornado F3	5	Sqn	RAF Coningsby
	11	Sqn	RAF Leeming
	23	Sqn	RAF Leeming
	25	Sqn	RAF Leeming
	29	Sqn	RAF Coningsby
	43	Sqn	RAF Leuchars
	111	Sqn	RAF Leuchars
Phantom FGR2	19	Sqn	RAF Wildenrath
	56	Sqn	RAF Wattisham
	74	Sqn	RAF Wattisham
	92	Sqn	RAF Wildenrath[1]
Bloodhound	85	Sqn	RAF West Raynham[2]
Rapier	16	Sqn RAF Regt	RAF Wildenrath
	26	Sqn RAF Regt	RAF Laarbruch
	27	Sqn RAF Regt	RAF Leuchars
	37	Sqn RAF Regt	RAF Bruggen
	48	Sqn RAF Regt	RAF Lossiemouth
	63	Sqn RAF Regt	RAF Gutersloh
Skyguard	2729	Sqn R Aux AF Regt	RAF Waddington
	2890	Sqn R Aux AF Regt	RAF Waddington
Airborne Early Warning			
Shackleton AEW	8	Sqn	RAF Lossiemouth[3]
Airborne Radio Relay			
Andover	115	Sqn	RAF Benson
Air Transport			
VC10	10	Sqn	RAF Brize Norton
Hercules	24	Sqn	RAF Lyneham
	30	Sqn	RAF Lyneham
	47	Sqn	RAF Lyneham
	70	Sqn	RAF Lyneham
Tristar	216	Sqn	RAF Brize Norton
HS125/Andover/Gazelle	32	Sqn	RAF Northolt
Andover	60	Sqn	RAF Wildenrath
Chinook	7	Sqn	RAF Odiham
	18	Sqn	RAF Gutersloh
Wessex	72	Sqn	RAF Aldergrove
Puma	33	Sqn	RAF Odiham
	230	Sqn	RAF Gutersloh
Tankers			
Victor K2	55	Sqn	RAF Marham
VC10 K2/K3	101	Sqn	RAF Brize Norton
Search and Rescue			
Sea King	202	Sqn	RAF Lossiemouth
			RAF Boulmer
			RAF Leconfield
			RAF Manston
			RAF Brawdy
Wessex	22	Sqn	RAF Leuchars
			RAF Coltishall
			RAF Chivenor
			RAF Valley
Ground Defence			
1 Light Armour Sqn RAF Regt			RAF Laarbruch
2 Light Armour Sqn RAF Regt			RAF Hullavington
3 Sqn RAF Regt			RAF Aldergrove
51 Light Armour Sqn RAF Regt			RAF Catterick
58 Light Armour Sqn RAF Regt			RAF Catterick
2503 Field Sqn R Aux AF Regt			RAF Waddington
2620 Field Sqn R Aux AF Regt			RAF Marham
2622 Field Sqn R Aux AF Regt			RAF Lossiemouth

	Location
2623 Field Sqn R Aux AF Regt	RAF Honington
2624 Field Sqn R Aux AF Regt	RAF Brize Norton
2625 Field Sqn R Aux AF Regt	RAF St. Mawgan

In addition, normal deployment outside the NATO area was:

Cyprus
Wessex, 84 Sqn; 34 Light Armour Sqn RAF Regt

Hong Kong
Wessex, 28 Sqn

Falkland Islands
1 Flt Phantom FGR2; 1 Flt Hercules; Chinook; Sea King; RAF Regt Rapier

Belize
1 Flt Harrier; 1 Flt Puma; RAF Regt Rapier

[1]92 Sqn is disbanding from 1 July.
[2]85 Sqn was retired on 1 July.
[3]The Shackleton was retired on 1 July. 8 Sqn is being re-equipped with E-3D Sentry aircraft based at RAF Waddington.

RAF Capability

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he is giving in "Options for Change" to medium-level capability for the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As clearly demonstrated by the operations in the Gulf, the RAF maintains an effective medium-level capability. This will not be affected by "Options for Change".

Naval Landing Platforms

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Royal Navy's landing platform dock replacement programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We expect to place the contract for project definiton of the design of two new assault ships shortly.

Tornado

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the GR4 version of the Tornado aircraft to be fully operational.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Tornado GR4 is planned to enter service in the second half of the decade.

Empty Properties

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number and locations of all those MOD properties in the Caradon area that are vacant at present; what is the length of time that they have been unoccupied; and what are his intentions for these properties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 12 vacant married quarters in the Caradon area at Torpoint. These have been vacant for fewer than three months. Eight of the properties are undergoing works and four will be alloted to incoming service families. In addition, one former married quarter is in the process of being sold.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 12 July 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Newtownards Courthouse (Union Flag)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General whether a union flag has been supplied to the courthouse in Newtownards in the constituency of Strangford; why the union flag was not flown on Her Majesty's official birthday; what arrangements have been made to fly the union flag at this courthouse on the designated days; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: A union flag has been supplied to the courthouse in Newtownards but was not flown on Her Majesty's official birthday through oversight. The courthouse is in possession of standing instructions for the flying of flags on all appropriate dates.

Legal Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General for what reasons the Lord Chancellor has decided not to approve the implementation of the scheme proposed by the Legal Aid Board to provide legal advice for defendants in housing possession proceedings.

The Attorney-General: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has yet to take any decision on these proposals which will be issued by the Legal Aid Board for consultation in the autumn.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Education Budgets

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received about local education authorities adjusting their budgets in a way that reduces the value represented by the 16 per cent. allocated for administrative and advisory purposes and therefore the amount available to grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: I am aware of general concerns on this issue, and have had one specific representation.

Social Work Diploma

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if students for the newly validated diploma in social work by the University of Wales will be entitled to a mandatory grant from local education authorities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Education Act 1962 restricts mandatory awards to certain categories of course. The diploma in social work course which is provided by the Cardiff Institute of Higher Education and validated by the University of Wales does not fall into any of these categories. I understand that the Cardiff institute has now applied to the university for validation of this course leading instead to a diploma of higher education. Eligible students enrolled on Dip HE courses at publicly funded institutions are entitled to mandatory awards under the 1962 Act and regulations.

History Curriculum

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what extra resources have been made available to fund the new history curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: Resources have not been specifically earmarked for the history curriculum. The implementation of the national curriculum is being supported by the Government via specific grants to local education authorities. These grants totalled some £100 million in 1989-90; some £120 million in 1990-91; and in 1991-92 they will support LEA expenditure of around £170 million.

Eligible expenditure includes the employment of advisory teachers, support for non-teaching support staff, the provision of extra books, materials and equipment and INSET. It is, however, for individual LEAs to apply for these grants, to identify needs and priorities for different subjects in the light of local circumstances and to direct spending towards them.

TRANSPORT

Weston-super-Mare Distributor Road

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be making a decision as a result of the public inquiry concerning the compulsory purchase of land for the Weston-super-Mare primary distributor road, stages VA and VB.

Mr. Chope: The decision should be issued shortly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Kenya Wildlife Trust

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Kenya wildlife trust to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 16 December to 20 December 1991.

Ethiopia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts are being made by his Department to ensure that existing food pledges result in immediate food deliveries to the people of Ethiopia.

Mrs. Chalker: The world food programme is responsible for the co-ordination of food aid deliveries to Ethiopia. In order to reach those in need as quickly as possible, we channel our food aid through international

agencies, including WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and British non-governmental organisations. Deliveries of United Kingdom food aid are phased to take account of in-country storage and distribution capacity. Britain has pledged 93,366 tonnes of food to Ethiopia since last September. A total of 55,000 tonnes is already in the country.

Africa

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all additional new funds allocated for food aid emergency relief to each country in Africa between January and the present time.

Mrs. Chalker: The list is as follows:

United Kingdom cereals food aid 1991

Country	*Tonnage*	*Estimated cost £ million*
Ethiopia	67,634	16·316
Sudan	67,500	14·531
Somalia[1]	8,000	2·128
Mozambique	17,630	2·953
Angola	7,472	1·700
Malawi	6,000	1·650
Uganda	6,706	0·900
Kenya	3,294	0·400
Totals	184,236	40·578

[1]To be committed when security situation permits.

Operation Lifeline

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the restarting of Operation Lifeline to the south of Sudan.

Mrs. Chalker: We have committed almost £14·9 million to Operation Lifeline Sudan—OLS—since it began in 1989. We have already pressed the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation movement to co-operate in the continuing implementation of OLS.

Mozambique

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been allocated to the transport and delivery of food to Mozambique by his Department from January to the present time; and whether he has any plans to make more money available for *(a)* relief, *(b)* market food aid and *(c)* to assist food transport and distribution to Mozambique.

Mrs. Chalker: We have allocated over £10 million for food aid, including transport, for Mozambique since January. This includes:

—£3·5 million bilaterally and £4·4 million through the EC for food and its distribution within Mozambique.

—£1·3 million bilaterally and £1 million through EC for food and its distribution to Mozambique refugees in Malawi.

We shall continue to play our part with other donors in responding to Mozambique's food aid requirements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Maydown Incinerator

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the incinerator proposed for the Maydown, Londonderry site will be required to have gas/gas heat exchanges to maintain the stack gases well above the gas clear point.

Mr. Needham: Any combustion plant including an incinerator will be required to incorporate heat exchangers to ensure that the flue gas temperature does not fall below the acid dew point.

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will bar telephones in his Department from connection to premium rate services.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 8 July 1991]:* All Departments in Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Office in London are reminded that, in the battle to reduce departmental running costs, the use of call barring, especially for premium rate services, can be an effective strategy.

Where it is technically achievable, call barring is applied to STD and international calls in addition to premium rate services throughout Departments in Northern Ireland and London.

Experience has shown that there are sound operational reasons for retaining access to premium rate telephone services for selected Government staff.

Call barring is used on a site-by-site basis to prevent misuse of the telephone system, while retaining an operationally effective service to users. The Department of Finance and Personnel provides central advice to all Departments on the effective use of telephone services. Call logging equipment is used to identify telephone traffic at a significant number of sites.

HEALTH

Estate Maintenance

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will quantify the total cost of the backlog of maintenance on the national health service estate for each district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: On 31 March 1990 (the latest information available) the cost of bringing the NHS estate to an overall condition which exhibited only minor deterioration was estimated to be £1·8 billion. The information by health authority is shown in the tables and includes property due to be replaced within three years, property not used for patient care, property awaiting planned preventive maintenance and property awaiting disposal. These four types of property together represent about 30 per cent. of the total NHS estate. In 1982 a report "Underused and Surplus Property in the NHS" said:

"It is clear that the backlog has accumulated over very many years"

and estimated that the cost of the work required to bring property in England up to an acceptable standard would be of the order of £2·9 billion, at 1990 prices.

Between 1979-80 and 1990-91 capital spending in the NHS rose by 62 per cent. in real terms. About 77 per cent.

of the resources allocated to NHS capital are invested in the estate and in the current year over 400 building projects each costing over £1 million are at various stages of planning, design and construction. The capital building programme for 1991-92 exceeds £1 billion.

District health authority	*Cost to B[1] (£ thousands)*
NORTHERN REGION	86,189
Hartlepool	5,650
North Tees	13,656
South Tees	5,296
East Cumbria	1,127
South Cumbria	8,622
West Cumbria	12,293
Darlington	4,530
Durham	7,272
North West Durham	926
South West Durham	5,260
Northumberland	14,104
Gateshead	[1]—
Newcastle	[1]—
North Tyneside	1,014
South Tyneside	2,840
Sunderland	3,599
YORKSHIRE REGION	110,446
Hull	5,609
East Yorkshire	6,200
Grimsby	3,531
Scunthorpe	4,809
Northallerton	1,525
York	2,497
Scarborough	1,442
Harrogate	400
Bradford	16,216
Airdale	7,089
Calderdale	[1]—
Huddersfield	1,051
Dewsbury	412
West Leeds	18,240
East Leeds	30,525
Wakefield	8,306
Pontefract	2,595
TRENT REGION	98,648
Regionally managed schemes	[1]—
North Derbyshire	6,154
South Derbyshire	5,841
Leicester	20,197
North Lincolnshire	2,937
South Lincolnshire	[1]—
Bassetlaw	4,373
Central Nottingham	17,353
Nottingham	20,038
Barnsley	1,200
Doncaster	5,182
Rotherham	1,573
Sheffield	13,801
EAST ANGLIA REGION	43,151
Cambridge	12,912
Peterborough	[1]—
West Suffolk	3,043
East Suffolk	11,770
Norwich	11,572
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	[1]—
West Norfolk and Wisbech	2,617
Huntingdon	1,237
NORTH WEST THAMES REGION	67,408
North Bedfordshire	4,967
South Bedfordshire	9,579
North Hertfordshire	[1]—
East Hertfordshire	[1]—
North West Hertfordshire	[1]—
South West Hertfordshire	3,488
Barnet	[1]—
Harrow	[1]—
Hillingdon	[1]—
Hounslow and Spelthorne	[1]—
Ealing	[1]—
Riverside	34,515
Parkside	14,859
NORTH EAST THAMES REGION	212,427
Basildon and Thurrock	2,350
Mid Essex	13,781
North East Essex	25,514
West Essex	3,700
Southend	350
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	31,458
Hampstead	21,895
Bloomsbury	[1]—
Islington	7,548
City and Hackney	39,675
Newham	[1]—
Tower Hamlets	16,500
Enfield	5,840
Haringey	7,144
Redbridge	17,441
Waltham Forest	19,231
SOUTH EASTERN THAMES REGION	122,805
Brighton	29,374
Eastbourne	3,700
Hastings	6,130
South East Kent	949
Canterbury & Thanet	26,224
Dartford and Gravesham	13,923
Maidstone	3,136
Medway	[1]—
Tunbridge Wells	10,240
Bexley	12,832
Greenwich	5,426
Bromley	[1]—
West Lambeth	10,872
Camberwell	[1]—
Lewisham & North Southwark	[1]—
SOUTH WEST THAMES REGION	164,932
North West Surrey	12,142
West Surrey and North East Hants	132
South West Surrey	6,965
Mid Surrey	11,411
East Surrey	7,575
Chichester	10,506
Mid Downs	13,526
Worthing	6,682
Croydon	6,592
Kingston & Esher	10,482
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	3,124
Wandsworth	66,421
Merton & Sutton	9,374
WESSEX REGION	62,060
East Dorset	—
West Dorset	[1]—
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	7,843
Southampton and South West Hampshire	[1]—
Winchester	11,035
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	6,132
Salisbury	[1]—
Swindon	3,611
Bath	30,967
Isle of Wight	2,472
OXFORD REGION	93,010
East Berkshire	14,962
West Berkshire	1,000
Aylesbury Vale	13,795
Wycombe	9,244
Milton Keynes	1,082
Kettering	11,786
Northampton	4,829

District health authority	Cost to B[2] (£ thousands)
Oxfordshire	36,312
SOUTH WESTERN REGION	100,226
Bristol and Weston	10,741
Frenchay	24,119
Southmead	5,819
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	8,527
Exeter	4,138
North Devon	1,759
Plymouth	13,389
Torbay	2,867
Cheltenham	2,933
Gloucester	11,700
Somerset	14,234
WEST MIDLANDS REGION	215,903
Bromsgrove and Redditch	3,828
Herefordshire	7,797
Kidderminster	4,283
Worcester	6,665
Shropshire	7,712
Mid Staffordshire	2,424
North Staffordshire	7,410
South East Staffordshire	28,066
Rugby	2,387
North Warwickshire	2,750
South Warwickshire	29,208
Central Birmingham	22,046
East Birmingham	[1]—
North Birmingham	15,251
South Birmingham	[1]—
West Birmingham	11,765
Coventry	17,714
Dudley	7,680
Sandwell	7,093
Solihull	2,857
Walsall	2,805
Wolverhampton	26,162
MERSEY REGION	74,460
Chester	[1]—
Crewe	3,448
Halton	590
Macclesfield	5,288
Warrington	3,296
Liverpool	36,242
St. Helens and Knowsley	2,881
Southport and Formby	2,857
South Sefton	9,396
Wirral	10,462
NORTH WESTERN REGION	83,251
Lancaster	3,068
Blackpool—Wyre and Fylde	5,168
Preston	[1]—
Blackburn, Hynburn and Ribble Valley	5,088
Burnley, Pendle and Rosendale	[1]—
West Lancashire	8,380
Chorley and South Ribble	2,558
Bolton	[1]—
Bury	800
North Manchester	18,804
Central Manchester	[1]—
South Manchester	9,478
Oldham	4,542
Rochdale	8,655
Salford	3,114
Stockport	2,499
Tameside and Glossop	3,296
Trafford	3,512
Wigan	4,290
NHS NATIONAL TOTAL 84 per cent.	1,534,915
PROJECTED TOTAL 100 per cent.	1,832,304

[1] No returns received to Cost to B.
[2] To an acceptable level.

Guidance on Hospital Discharge

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps his Department has taken to encourage health authorities to ensure that guidance on hospital discharge is followed in hospitals from which they purchase services.

Mr. Dorrell: Existing guidance continues to be binding on health authorities. Purchasers will be able to specify in their contracts with providers the discharge procedures they wish to see followed.

Food Poisoning

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing for each district health authority in London the number of food poisoning incidents reported for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not available in the form requested. Cases of food poisoning reported to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys by each of the four Thames regional health authorities for the period 1979-90 are set out in the table.

Notifications of food poisoning which were (a) formally notified, (b) ascertained by other means and (c) total by regional health authority: 1979-90

Year		North West Thames	North East Thames	South East Thames	South West Thames
1979		775	1,209	609	687
1980		743	804	622	622
1981		815	642	596	641
1982	(a)	923	912	659	660
	(b)	281	435	96	606
	(c)	1,204	1,347	755	1,266
1983	(a)	1,060	907	894	745
	(b)	637	427	176	665
	(c)	1,697	1,334	1,070	1,410
1984	(a)	1,174	1,206	1,024	620
	(b)	728	783	227	689
	(c)	1,902	1,989	1,251	1,309
1985	(a)	1,169	1,174	1,079	920
	(b)	717	480	260	550
	(c)	1,886	1,654	1,339	1,470

Year		North West Thames	North East Thames	South East Thames	South West Thames
1986	(a)	1,143	1,591	1,253	1,111
	(b)	712	599	376	605
	(c)	1,855	2,190	1,629	1,716
1987	(a)	1,534	2,073	1,706	1,376
	(b)	825	583	382	631
	(c)	2,359	2,656	2,088	2,007
1988	(a)	1,856	2,439	2,315	1,848
	(b)	736	582	405	869
	(c)	2,592	3,021	2,720	2,717
1989	(a)	2,205	3,037	2,974	2,314
	(b)	852	734	585	724
	(c)	3,057	3,771	3,559	3,038
1990	(a)	2,507	2,756	2,502	2,160
	(b)	731	775	780	913
	(c)	3,238	3,531	3,282	3,073

Note:

(a) "formal notifications" are made by the doctor in attendance to the proper officer for each local government district under the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984.

(b) cases "ascertained by other means" are identified during outbreak investigation.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for curtailing the publication of national health service waiting lists; what consideration he has given to the implications of such a proposal for health budget holders wishing to shop around for treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have no intention of curtailing the collection and publication of information on waiting lists and times.

We currently collect and publish information on waiting lists and times in districts within which treatment is provided. However, this does not show waiting performance of individual hospitals, and is a poor guide for "shopping around". From April 1991 we are also collecting figures by district residence. Both sets of figures will be collated within my Department for up to two years so as to ensure continuity of data while the new data flows settle down.

Thereafter we propose to collect centrally only the residence-based figures, in order to monitor purchasing health effectiveness in securing early treatment for their residents. Statistics on waiting times at individual hospitals will continue to be held at local level, as now. Arrangements will be made for ensuring the wide availability of hospital level information to purchasing health authorities, GP fund-holders and others before the central collection of provider-based statistics is finally dropped.

Medical Manpower

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the report of the review of continence services.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 10 July at column *410*.

Children's Homes

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many residential placements each local authority in England and Wales intends to provide in children's homes in 1992;

(2) how many new local authority children's homes were opened and in which local authorities in England and Wales in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1991;

(3) how many residential placements were provided in children's homes on 1 June in each local authority in England and Wales;

(4) how many local authority children's homes were closed and in which authorities during *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information available centrally relates to the number of children in the care of each local authority who are in children's homes rather than the number of homes or places. This information relates to the local authority responsible for the child not the authority responsible for the home.

This information is published in "Children in Care of Local Authorities", a copy of which is available in the Library. The most recent edition is for the year ending 31 March 1988: the 1989 edition will be published shortly.

Child Care Initiative

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the recent child care initiative from the European Community Social Affairs Commissioner and Her Majesty's Government's policy towards it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no knowledge of any recent child care initiative taken by the European Commission. The Council recommendation on child care mentioned in the press release issued by the Commission on 3 July has not yet been forwarded to the Government.

HIV-AIDS Tests

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many tests for HIV and AIDS have been carried for each health authority in England and Wales for each of the past five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* Data on the number of tests carried out for the human immunodeficiency virus (there is no test for AIDS) by region and district are not collected. However, an indication of the trends in testing can be obtained by

examining the total numbers of HIV tests (not including the tests associated with unlinked anonymous testing) carried out by the public health laboratory service laboratories for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These are given as follows (to the nearest 500).

	Number
1986	102,500
1987	161,000
1988	142,000
1989	141,000
1990	167,500

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many tests for HIV and AIDS have been carried out on pregnant women in the past five years in each health authority in England and Wales;

(2) how many of the pregnant women who have been tested for AIDS in England and Wales over the past five years had positive test results; and how many were informed of the result of the test, by health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 July 1991]:* Data on pregnant women tested via voluntary named testing are not collected centrally.

In the anonymised HIV ante-natal survey a total of 52,813 samples were tested between January and September 1990. The numbers tested and the prevalence rates are as follows:

Area	*Number of specimens tested*	*Prevalence—one person in*
Inner London	23,166	500
Outer London and rest of South East England	13,668	1,500
Rest of country	15,979	16,000

CIVIL SERVICE

Polygraphs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what use has been made of polygraphs in the civil service during the past five years.

Mr. Renton: None.

WALES

Orthopaedics Treatment Centre

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what bids he has received for expansion of the operating theatre complex at the treatment centre for elective orthopaedics at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar; what number of waiting list initiative artificial knee and hip operations are to be undertaken under the terms of the bid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A bid of £300,000 for additional theatre facilities to serve the whole of the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar has been received from South Glamorgan health authority under the 1991-92 waiting times initiative. It does not specify the additional throughput that will result and my officials are in touch with the authority.

Official Visit (America)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list his full itinerary for the recently completed investment mission to North America.

Mr. David Hunt: During the mission I undertook engagments in the states of California (San Jose, Los Angeles, San Diego) Minnesota (Minneapolis/St. Paul), Michigan, Connecticut, New York state (Buffalo, Rochester, New Jersey) and New York city; and in Canada I visited Toronto, Peterborough and Ottawa. I visited 20 companies and met over 200 senior company representatives.

Footpath Inquiry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now announce the date and venue of the public inquiry regarding the diversion of footpath 46 at Frampton road, Gorseinon, Swansea.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The order was made by Lliw Valley borough council under the Highways Act 1980 in May and has been advertised. There has been one objection. The order must now be submitted to my right hon. Friend for determination. Once it has been received a public inquiry will be held before a decision is reached. As promised in previous correspondence, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman once the inquiry has been arranged and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Council House Sales

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the value of council house sales in each of the Welsh housing authorities since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information which is available is shown in the following table; figures for 1979-80 and 1980-81 are not available on a consistent basis.

Receipts from the sale of council houses[1]

£'000s

Local authority	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Alyn and Deeside	691	388	446	847	1,155	943	1,150	2,257	3,724	2,147
Colwyn	754	705	532	415	544	605	758	1,305	1,407	787
Delyn	773	651	1,068	3,889	453	681	1,089	1,070	1,986	85
Glyndwr	791	1,212	627	438	1,498	727	709	1,875	2,017	867
Rhuddlan	412	335	373	391	627	467	844	1,541	1,457	881
Wrexham Maelor	2,009	1,388	719	867	1,320	1,997	3,095	4,433	10,329	4,322
Carmarthen	1,628	1,348	963	944	632	741	845	1,549	1,793	1,697
Ceredigion	1,628	1,888	1,193	819	580	1,020	869	2,291	3,133	1,877
Dinefwr	712	596	336	329	484	768	730	1,198	1,279	1,260
Llanelli	1,645	1,874	2,139	1,352	1,141	1,695	1,984	3,258	3,383	2,236

Local authority	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2,623	1,539	1,666	1,108	1,053	1,123	1,245	3,137	4,217	2,367
South Pembrokeshire	112	1,121	1,511	1,009	456	446	728	1,745	1,976	0
Blaenau Gwent	954	1,586	1,005	723	3,406	1,386	1,511	2,932	4,750	2,162
Islwyn	1,653	8,274	2,775	1,767	1,541	2,193	2,550	4,118	4,229	1,531
Monmouth	285	260	3,036	2,563	1,974	2,088	2,763	4,097	4,689	2,144
Newport	1,878	2,623	2,884	3,135	7,534	3,486	3,490	6,972	8,513	2,745
Torfaen	2,674	3,722	3,009	2,552	1,465	4,811	3,532	7,170	9,380	4,875
Aberconwy	1,095	1,270	804	692	734	858	1,071	2,566	3,201	183
Arfon	1,054	2,200	723	851	548	777	738	2,085	2,570	1,242
Dwyfor	1	512	244	156	220	143	129	352	521	591
Meirionnydd	0	1,013	664	341	394	407	590	1,054	1,296	497
Ynys Mon	1,085	875	486	517	1,144	920	739	2,918	3,868	1,910
Cynon Valley	0	2,494	1,120	560	526	1,062	1,015	1,302	557	2,078
Merthyr Tydfil	1,379	1,784	1,032	849	1,257	1,627	1,842	2,663	3,156	1,213
Ogwr	1,403	3,816	9,104	3,204	3,106	3,674	2,998	5,144	6,220	3,466
Rhondda	362	191	230	202	275	398	355	557	738	628
Rhymney Valley	1,880	2,659	2,073	1,719	1,615	2,839	3,175	3,023	4,407	3,541
Taff Ely	20	992	1,886	1,724	1,802	2,910	3,663	4,707	6,155	365
Brecknock	1,922	328	1,149	1,015	918	1,159	1,324	1,977	1,325	0
Montgomeryshire	10	104	946	648	782	1,207	1,065	1,864	2,230	1,068
Radnorshire	701	670	689	281	317	296	595	774	881	500
Cardiff	2,355	1,515	4,015	5,039	6,312	11,529	9,179	14,349	16,819	8,319
Vale of Glamorgan	1,449	2,762	2,766	2,274	2,084	3,297	2,947	5,755	5,079	2,260
Port Talbot	890	435	1,950	1,850	2,080	2,517	3,063	4,211	5,182	2,624
Lliw Valley	734	1,266	502	623	960	1,372	1,343	1,731	2,968	2,475
Neath	1,636	1,140	714	947	1,410	1,539	1,864	2,482	3,038	1,951
Swansea	0	1,607	1,831	6,027	1,580	2,260	3,588	8,467	9,624	4,375
TOTAL DISTRICTS	39,198	57,143	57,210	52,667	53,927	65,968	69,175	118,929	148,097	71,269

[1] Includes the repayment of principal on local authority mortgages on council house sales.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been received from the sale of council houses in Wales since 1979; how much of this sum has been kept by the councils; and how much has gone to central Government.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Capital receipts from council house sales have totalled £734 million from 1981-82 to 1990-91. These receipts are not, and never have been, returned to central Government but are used by councils themselves either to finance new capital expenditure or to redeem debt.

Cardiff-Wales Airport

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the Government's response to the Welsh Affairs Committee report, HC 166 of Session 1990-91, on Cardiff-Wales airport.

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce that the repsonse has been published today as Command Paper 1584.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the highest award of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each year from 1981 to date, *(b)* the lowest award, *(c)* the average award and *(d)* the total award in the same years.

Mr. John Patten: The available information is shown in the following table:

Year	Highest award	Average award	Total compensation	Fixed minimum award
	£	£	£	£
April 1981—31 March 1982	136,500	1,267	21,976,696	250
1982-83	112,000	1,492	29,444,675	250
1983-84	123,250	1,553	32,820,772	[1]400
1984-85	303,500	1,785	35,293,451	400
1985-86	175,809	1,844	41,559,996	400
1986-87	400,000	2,200	48,241,764	400
1987-88	496,400	2,482	52,042,581	[2]550
1988-89	307,781	2,484	69,381,286	550
1989-90	834,703	2,679	72,721,563	550
1990-91[4]	n/a	3,138	110,433,000	[3]750

[1] From 1 February 1983.
[2] From 7 November 1986.
[3] From 1 February 1990.
[4] Provisional figures.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the aggregate amount of compensation paid by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each year from 1981 to date and *(b)* the total number of recipients.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Year	*Total value of awards* £	*Number of recipients*
April 1981—31 March 1982	21,976,696	17,350
1982-83	29,444,675	19,733
1983-84	32,820,773	21,133
1984-85	35,293,451	19,771
1985-86	41,559,996	22,534
1986-87	48,241,764	21,925
1987-88	52,042,581	20,991
1988-89	69,381,286	27,752
1989-90	72,721,563	27,926
1990-91[1]	110,433,000	35,190
Totals	513,915,784	234,305

[1] Provisional figures.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of single member decisions of Criminal Injuries Compensation Board awards for each year from 1981 to date.

Mr. John Patten: The available information on awards made by the board, which includes decisions taken by more than one member following a hearing, is given in the following table:

Year	*Monetary awards*	*Nil awards*	*Interim awards*	*Total*
April 1981—31 March 1982	17,350	4,395	3,875	25,620
1982-83	19,733	5,354	3,297	28,384
1983-84	21,133	7,622	3,356	32,111
1984-85	19,771	6,940	3,152	29,863
1985-86	22,934	6,711	3,792	33,437
1986-87	21,925	6,480	3,571	31,976
1987-88	20,991	6,484	3,316	30,791
1988-89	27,752	8,219	3,977	39,948
1989-90	27,926	8,580	3,307	39,813
1990-91[1]	35,190	14,841	4,106	54,137

[1] Provisional figures.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information his Department received following the foiled attempt at a mass escape from Crumlin Road prison, Belfast, in October 1989 about the smuggling of Semtex, a pistol and ammunition into the prison in the heels of trainer shoes; and what subsequent action was taken to alert all prisons in the United Kingdom to this technique.

Mrs. Rumbold: Officials from the prison service in England and Wales meet officials from Northern Ireland and Scotland several times each year to discuss security and to share information. This is regular and ongoing.

The problems of concealment of various weapons and other contraband in footwear is very well known. Specific warning advice was issued to governors in England and Wales in December 1985 about the dangers of weapons being concealed in this way. Similar advice on the dangers of contraband items being concealed in shoes was issued on eight separate occasions between August 1982 and April 1991. The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Prisons (Industrial Disputes)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons which at 9 July had an industrial dispute; and if he will also list the nature of the disputes.

Mrs. Rumbold: Industrial disputes, registered under the agreed disputes procedure between prison service management and the Prison Officers Association, were recorded at 49 prisons in England and Wales as at 11 July 1991. The establishments are listed. The majority of the disputes are about staffing figures. Other disputes cover matters including shift systems, local conditions and overcrowding, prison regimes and opposite sex postings policy.

Acklington
Albany
Askham Grange
Bedford
Birmingham
Bristol
Bullwood Hall
Cardiff
Castington
Chelmsford
Coldingley
Durham
Erlestoke
Featherstone
Frankland
Glen Parva
Hatfield
Hindley
Hull
Leeds
Lewes
Lindholme
Littlehey
Liverpool
Long Lartin
Manchester
Moorland
New Hall
Northallerton
Norwich
Nottingham
Onley
Oxford
Pentonville
Preston
Risley
Shepton Mallet
Stafford
Stoken
Styal
Swaleside
Swansea
Swinfen Hall
Thorp Arch
Wakefield
Wetherby
Winchester
Wormwood Scrubs
Wymott

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictive practices exist in the prison service.

Mrs. Rumbold: The "fresh start" agreement in 1987 involved the abolition of a number of inefficient working practices and systems of attendance. This was followed last year by the removal of outdated national restrictions on the civilianisation of prison officers' work. There is still scope in some instances for securing the more efficient matching of work and resources within individual establishments. That is something which is currently being addressed through an establishment-by-establishment work identification exercise known as the corporate objectives process.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on improvements in productivity at Brixton prison since the inception of fresh start.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under "fresh start" efficiencies in the use of prison officers' hours are being achieved through progressive reductions in their average working week. The extent of the efficiencies which are achievable varies between establishments depending on the way that work is organised and on changes in workload since 1987. At Brixton, between April 1987 and April 1991 there was a 24 per cent. efficiency improvement in the use of prison officer hours, which is slightly more than the national average of 22 per cent.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the effect on the "fresh start" initiative on prison regimes.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since the "fresh start" initiative to improve efficiency in the use of prison service manpower was introduced in 1987, there has been a general improvement in the level of regime delivery with an 8 per cent. increase in activity hours per inmate in 1989-90 and a further 7 per cent. increase in 1990-91.

SCOTLAND

Local Authority Housing (Transfers)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority houses have been voluntarily transferred to *(a)* private companies, *(b)* housing associations, *(c)* tenant co-operatives, *(d)* Scottish Homes and *(e)* any other landlord by each housing authority in Scotland in each year since 1989.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The following tables give details of voluntary disposals of local authority houses to which my right hon. Friend's consent was given in 1989-90 and 1990-91 in terms of section 12(7) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 or section 74(2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Number of houses for which consent was given for transfer by district councils to other landlords by voluntary disposal

1989-90			*Voluntary disposal to:*		
District council	*Private companies*	*Housing associations*	*Co-operatives*	*Scottish homes*	*Other*
Angus	36	—	—	—	—
Banff and Buchan	—	—	—	—	1
Clydebank	—	—	218	—	—
Edinburgh	—	14	7	—	—
Glasgow	—	88	—	—	—
Perth and Kinross	—	24	72	—	1
Tweeddale	—	—	—	—	1
West Lothian	—	26	—	—	—
Total	36	152	297	—	3

1990-91			*Voluntary disposal to:*		
District council	*Private companies*	*Housing associations*	*Co-operatives*	*Scottish homes*	*Other*
Argyll and Bute	—	12	—	—	—
Banff and Buchan	—	—	—	—	2
Clydebank	—	96	—	—	—
Dundee	—	82	—	—	—
Edinburgh	—	—	11	—	16
East Lothian	—	10	—	—	—
Glasgow	—	704	154	—	2
Kincardine and Deeside	—	1	—	—	—
Motherwell	—	—	140	—	—
Orkney	—	11	—	—	—
Perth and Kinross	—	—	54	—	—
Renfrew	244	11	—	—	—
Total	244	927	359	—	20

Forth Valley Enterprise

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of public money given to Forth Valley Enterprise, with a breakdown stating the amounts given to individual training companies; and whether he will express all the amounts as expenditure per trainee.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The distribution of funds from within its grant-in-aid to local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *131*.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* The advertising companies employed by my Department in connection with the campaigns referred to in my answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *131* are Faulds Advertising Ltd. of Edinburgh and The Leith Agency of Edinburgh.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the commencement date and duration of each of the publicity campaigns given in his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *131*.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* The duration of the advertising campaigns referred to in my answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *131* are as follows:

Road Safety:

Television:	8 April to 30 June 1991
	2-29 September 1991
	2-29 March 1992
Radio:	3 July-2 September 1991
	6-26 January 1992
Press:	October and November 1991
	(exact dates remain under discussion)

Crime Prevention:
Television and Radio: 4-25 October 1991

Fire Prevention:
Exact timing remains under discussion

Right to Buy:
Exact timing remains under discussion

Children's Hearings:
Press: Week commencing 26 August 1991

PRIME MINISTER

EC Environment Policies

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement of his policy on *(a)* EC proposals to ban the sale of fish contaminated with pesticides and *(b)* plans for the EC's own environmental protection agency.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom has consistently supported the concept of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and greatly regrets that the delay in deciding its location is holding up its establishment. We see the provision of objective, reliable and comparable environmental information at the European level, which is the aim of the EEA, as the only sound basis for formulating environmental policies. As to the first part of the question I am not aware of any EC proposals on this subject.

Marine Pollution

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the outcome of last year's conference of North sea states; what is his policy on *(a)* a ban on dumping of nuclear waste at sea and *(b)* a declaration to reduce output of pollutants blamed for blooms of toxic marine algae.

The Prime Minister: We made it clear at last year's North sea conference that we have no plans for disposing of radioactive waste from ships or seabed artificial structures into or beneath the seabed. We have always followed the recommendations of the competent international organisations on the dumping of waste and agree that this disposal option is not suitable for the North sea. Nevertheless we have not completely ruled out sea disposal for large items such as boilers from decommissioned power stations and are keeping under review whether this disposal option may be required at some further date.

Algal bloom, including toxic marine algae, occurs naturally in the marine environment, but, in slow-moving shallow water areas with a high proportion of freshwater from rivers, nutrients from agriculture and sewage discharges can be a determining factor. In the North sea these conditions occur along the eastern coastal seaboard particularly in the Wadden sea and Skaggerak. Given the circulation pattern of the North sea, discharges of nutrients from the United Kingdom do not contribute to this problem.

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what initiatives he plans to take to advance the aims of avoiding world over-armament as agreed in annex VII of the Presidency conclusions of the European Council meeting at Luxembourg on 28-29 June.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* We are actively pursuing a number of initiatives to encourage greater responsibility and transparency in the international transfer of conventional weapons, and to combat proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The five leading arms exporters met in Paris on 8-9 July and agreed to develop machinery for continuing consultations on arms transfers. A further meeting will be held in London.

The Paris meeting also endorsed our initiative to establish a United Nations register of arms transfers. The initiative has attracted wide support. The European Council on 28-29 June announced that the Twelve will present a resolution to set up such a register at the next United Nations General Assembly.

These issues are on the agenda of next week's London economic summit.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the arrangements in place for the assistance by the United Kingdom of environmental clean-up, environmental protection and industrial development for countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* The know-how fund is the main focus of the United Kingdom's environmental and industrial assistance to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. On 21 June we announced an environmental programme for eastern Europe worth £5 million over three years. Multilaterally we co-ordinate our efforts through the G24 with participation by all OECD countries and relevant international organisations. There are separate G24 sub-groups which address environmental issues and investment and economic/industrial restructuring. In addition to EC's Poland and Hungary aid for economic reconstruction (PHARE) programme has so far made available some £152 million for economic/industrial restructuring and £71 million in environmental help.

G7 Economic Summit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what environmental initiatives *(a)* he intends to raise and *(b)* Her Majesty's Government have been informed that other heads of state and Governments intend to raise at the forthcoming G7 economic summit in London.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* The summit is an informal meeting between Heads of Government. I hope that the summit will give impetus to the run-up to the UN conference on environment and development, in particular on climate change, the protection of biological diversity and the conservation of forests.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with representatives of international businesses concerning the G7 summit; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* I met representatives of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) on 2 July to exchange views on the issues likely to arise at the London economic summit. The ICC endorsed the importance which the Government attach to low inflation as a necessary condition for sustained growth in the world economy and shared the Government's wish to secure early progress in the Uruguay round of GATT talks. We also discussed the ICC's ideas on technical assistance to the Soviet Union and the countries of central and eastern Europe.

DEFENCE

Chipmunks

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the annual costs of running the Royal Naval grading flight of Chipmunks out of Plymouth airport for each of the last five years, setting out the individual figures for flying costs, airport costs and training costs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested. The total annual cost of the grading flight over the period in question was:

Year	*£ 000s*
1986-87	772·0
1987-88	901·5
1988-89	929·0
1989-90	952·7
1990-91	978·0

MOD Police

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost to his Department of moving the headquarters and other facilities of the Ministry of Defence police to RAF Wethersfield; and from which subheads of which votes these funds will be taken.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The relocation has been agreed on the basis that costs will be more than offset by the savings which will be made.

Nuclear Submarines

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all United Kingdom nuclear fleet submarines, the year each submarine came into service, the likely year for each to be decommissioned and the plans for that decommissioning, including possible location; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The nuclear fleet submarines currently in service are:

Vessel	*Accepted into service*
Valiant	1966
Courageous	1971
Swiftsure	1973
Sovereign	1974
Superb	1976
Sceptre	1978
Spartan	1979
Splendid	1981
Trafalgar	1983
Turbulent	1984
Tireless	1985
Torbay	1987
Trenchant	1989
Talent	1990

In addition, Dreadnought was withdrawn from service in 1982-83 and is currently stored afloat at Rosyth. Churchill, Conqueror and Warspite were withdrawn from service in 1990 and are currently in the process of being decommissioned. Churchill is at Rosyth and Conqueror and Warspite are at Devonport.

It is not our practice to release in advance details of projected dates or planned locations for decommissioning nuclear-powered submarines.

Manpower

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the current and planned totals for *(a)* three-star posts and *(b)* two-star posts and *(c)* one-star posts, distinguishing military and civil posts, and distinguishing for military posts between command and staff appointments and for civilian posts between scientific/engineering posts and administrative ones.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on 11 July 1991.

Injured Grenadiers

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the meeting which took place between his officials and the solicitor representing the three injured guardsmen.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The meeting provided a full and useful discussion on the merits of the case. MOD officials provided some further information to the solicitor and undertook to provide other information as requested.

Redundancies

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer given by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 2 July, *Official Report*, column

149, what is his policy on informing hon. Members about forthcoming announcements of redundancies at his Department's workplaces.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend's general practice is to give notice to those hon. Members whose constituents are mainly affected whenever the number of civilian staff in question is 25 or more. That is the same threshold as is agreed for consultation with trade unions at departmental level. Proposals of lesser scale are normally handled at local level.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Norwegian Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy in the European economic area negotiations with Norway to insist that any new fish provided by Norway should be allocated among EC member states in accordance with the principle of relative stability.

Mr. Curry: Under relative stability, established EC fishing opportunities are divided among member states according to fixed keys, although new fishing opportunities may be allocated according to new keys. In the negotiations for a European economic area, the Government are continuing to work strenuously to safeguard the principle of relative stability.

Cows Milk (Dioxin)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has yet determined the source of the dioxin found in the milk of cows from the Bolsover area.

Mr. Maclean: A detailed research programme will shortly be under way on the two farms concerned and on a number of other farms in the area. However, the complexity of the scientific analyses that need to be carried out means that there will be some delay before they can be completed.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reports of damage to farm workers following exposure to organophosphorous sheep dips he has received in the last six months; and whether he has received any similar reports relating to other types of sheep dip.

Mr. Maclean: Between 1 January and 30 June 1991, seven reports of suspected adverse reactions to sheep dips involving farmers and farm workers have been received by the veterinary medicines directorate. Six involved organophosphorous compounds and one a non-organophosphorous compound. The reports cover incidents which occurred between July 1985 and April 1990. All are being followed up.

In addition, we have received 18 brief reports from the National Poisons Centre which our officials are also investigating. We are not yet able to say whether these reports include duplicates of those mentioned, specifically involve farmers or farm workers, or relate to the use of organophosphorous compounds.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effects have been identified on agricultural employment by Reading university in its evaluation, commissioned by him, of the set-aside scheme and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have recently received Reading university's evaluation of set-aside and am now studying it. The university will be publishing its findings later this year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Conventional Forces in Europe

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the updated memorandum of understanding required under the conventional forces in Europe treaty giving the details of the location of British forces in the United Kingdom and continental Europe.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

A copy of the updated British data exchanged in accordance with section VII of the protocol on notification and exchange of information to the CFE treaty has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received a copy of the updated memorandum of understanding required under the conventional forces in Europe treaty giving the details of the location of United States forces in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

We have received in accordance with section VII of the protocol on notification and exchange of information the data provided by the US Administration as required under the CFE treaty, which includes details of US forces in the United Kingdom.

United Nations Emergency Operations Office (Africa)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to make representations to the United Nations Secretary General concerning the re-establishment of an office for emergency operations in Africa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. We welcome the United Nations Secretary-General's announcement on 7 July that he is strengthening the Office of the Under Secretary-General dealing inter alia with relief operations in Africa in order to be able to respond effectively to emergencies. The Office is to enjoy the responsibilities and powers which fell to the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa until its closure in 1986. We are pursuing separately in the United Nations our initiative to support and improve the United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies.

Hong Kong

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current salary of the governor of Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The present salary of the governor of Hong Kong, which is set and paid by the Hong Kong Government, is Hong Kong dollars 160,100 per month.

Croatia and Slovenia

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the position adopted by each EC country, including the United Kingdom, at the last meeting of the Council of Ministers regarding the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia as independent sovereign states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under the Brioni agreement of 7-8 July Slovenia and Croatia have agreed to suspend for three months implementation of their declarations of independence. EC Foreign Ministers met in The Hague on 10 July and confirmed their support for the Brioni agreement. The EC has also agreed to support constitutional talks aimed at meeting the aspirations of all Yugoslavia's peoples.

Expo 92

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage Crown colonies to bring forward proposals or exhibits for the British pavilion at Expo 92, Seville; and if he will list those Crown colonies so far approached.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No such steps are being taken because, as has been made clear in answer to previous questions, it is not our intention to solicit exhibits for the British pavilion at Expo 92 on a geographical basis.

British Hostages

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British hostages are presently believed to be held in Lebanon; what are their names; on what dates each of them was taken hostage; what information he has about organisations involved in these kidnappings; what is the latest information he has about the whereabouts of the hostages; what steps are being taken to ensure their immediate release; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We believe there are three British hostages being held in Lebanon. Mr. John McCarthy was kidnapped on 17 April 1986; Mr. Terry Waite on 20 January 1987; and Mr. Jack Mann on 12 May 1989. We do not have firm information on which organisations were involved in the kidnappings, or on where in Lebanon the hostages are currently held. We continue to make every effort to secure the release of the hostages, and remain in close touch with all parties we believe may be able to help in achieving this goal.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will place in the Library the applications of bodies to be recognised as supervisory bodies under the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to a question from the hon. Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) on 19 December 1990 at col. *187*.

Domestic Accidents

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 20 June, *Official Report*, column *282*, if he can break down the various causes of fatal accidents in the home.

Mr. Leigh: The information requested is published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys as table 5 in "Mortality Statistics", series DH4 (numbers 13-15 for years 1987-89), copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

New Homes

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has completed his examination of new homes structural warranty services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Following publication of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on structural warranties for new homes the Secretary of State has been consulting widely on possible remedies. He is considering the outcome of this process of consultation and will announce his decision in due course.

BCCI

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what equity shareholding CCL Assurance had in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International; and what information he has on the amount of clients' funds invested in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International by CCL Assurance.

Mr. Redwood: CCL Assurance has told my Department that it has no equity shareholding in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI). It has also provided me in confidence with information about the location of all its assets, including assets representing its policyholders' funds.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department is carrying out an investigation into CCL Assurance, in connection with the closure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Mr. Redwood: I am prepared to consider any information the hon. Member may provide which might warrant an investigation.

Bass, Preston Brook

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 8 July, if he has anything to add to his answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, column *577* about assistance to Bass at Preston Brook.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to amend the statement made in my answer of 28 June, that Preston Brook is not in an assisted area. It is, and companies there can qualify for DTI regional assistance. I apologise for this mistake, which arose from an administrative error in my Department. Action is being taken to prevent recurrence. I can now add that Bass received £494,102 of regional development grant under the original scheme, paid in 1987-88; this grant was not linked to job creation.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *187*.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* There have been no such surveys.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the advertising, promotional or public relations companies employed by, or on behalf of, his Department who are involved in the campaigns given in his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *20*.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* The Department does not normally employ contractors in a purely promotional or public relations capacity. Four advertising agencies are currently retained in connection with activities listed in my earlier answer. They are: WCRS (enterprise initiative); BMP DDB Needham (various); Barkers LBW Human Resources Advertising (staff recruitment); and Spring, O'Brien, Tolson (inward investment—activities in the United States of America).

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will deposit in the Library an analysis of the estimated distributional impact using the Treasury's interdepartmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model of the proposed council tax in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales using the illustrative bills published by the responsible Departments, which is, as far as possible, comparable with appendix 7 of HC 289 of Session 1990-91 and the answer of 22 May, *Official Report*, column *471*;

(2) if he will publish a list of those parliamentary answers on the impact of *(a)* the council tax and *(b)* other local government tax options which have been based, in part or in whole, upon evidence derived from the Treasury's interdepartmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model.

Mr. Portillo: I have been asked to reply.

Information to indicate the distribution of households with one, two and three or more adults by region has been provided. No answers have been given on the impact of the council tax using the interdepartmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model.

Since 1988 the Department of the Environment has made extensive use of the interdepartmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model to illustrate the distributional impact of the community charge, and the effect of the transitional relief and community charge reduction schemes. A large number of parliamentary answers have been provided which are reliant to some degree on information from the model. We do not, however, intend to publish any analysis of the impact of the council tax derived from the model.

Drinking Water

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures Her Majesty's Government are taking in order to implement the recent Luxembourg agreement to reduce the level of permitted nitrates in drinking water.

Mr. Baldry: The directive agreed at the recent Environment Council in Luxembourg did not change the level of nitrate permitted in drinking water. It provided for action to reduce leaching of nitrate from agricultural sources into raw water. The Government are considering the scope and content of the measures needed to implement the directive.

Squash Clubs

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the method by which uniform business rates are applied to commercially operated squash clubs.

Mr. Key: No. Most non-domestic property is subject to rates. Ratepayers who were dissatisfied with their rating assessments had the right to challenge them within the first six months of the life of the 1990 rating lists.

Water Companies

19. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the turnover in the last year before privatisation of each of the English and Welsh water authorities.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the companies. However, this information is contained in the annual reports and accounts for the year ending 1989, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Local Government Boundary Commission is going to publish its report on the response to its draft proposals on its review of the boundary of the borough of Rotherham with the boundaries of Sheffield, Doncaster, the county of Derbyshire and the county of Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Key: The conduct of the review is a matter for the commission.

City Challenge

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have bid for city challenge funds.

Mr. Heseltine: Twenty-one. In addition to the 15 local authorities invited to participate in the pacemaker round of city challenge on 23 May [*Official Report*, column *549*], Coventry, Newham, Sandwell, St. Helens, Stockton-on-Tees and Sunderland have submitted bids.

Next week my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government, and I are due to visit the 15 invited authorities to receive presentations of the bids.

I have been impressed by the hard work, enthusiasm and commitment behind all the bids. This is precisely the spirit we are aiming to foster through city challenge.

I have considered carefully six additional bids that we have received and decided that Sunderland and Stockton-on-Tees should also be asked to present their bids to a Minister. We shall then consider their case alongside the invited bids.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is today writing to the other four authorities to thank them very much for their bids, but to let them know that they will not be successful in this year's pacemaker round of city challenge.

We hope that they will build on what they have achieved and that they will participate in the further round of city challenge which we intend to hold next year, subject to the successful progress of the first round.

Nuclear Reactors

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has conducted any research on the use of nuclear reactors as facilities to neutralise bacteria and viruses in raw sewage during their decommissioning phase.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* No such research has been carried out by this Department.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Building Societies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration had been given at the time of the 1985 Budget to proposals for transitional arrangements to obtain the tax subject to the Woolwich case judgment and to clause 50 of the Finance Bill; when the intention was first made public; and in which way.

Mr. Maples: The 1985 Budget announcement followed confidential discussions between the Inland Revenue and the Building Societies Association over a period of some months, about the building societies' tax scheme as a whole, including the transitional arrangements required on the changeover from an annual to a quarterly accounting system in line with that for banks. A Budget day press release mentioned the need for transitional provisions to deal with the changeover.

Soft Drinks Industry

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of tax paid by the soft drinks industry in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maude: We estimate that VAT accruing on consumer's expenditure on soft drinks in 1990 was £430 million. Figures for taxes paid by the soft drink industry itself are not separately identifiable.

Tax Revenue

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the projected additional yield in tax revenue from *(a)* income tax, *(b)* VAT and *(c)* corporation tax over five years consequentially of an annual compounded economic growth rate of 2·5 per cent. assuming that tax rates remain as they are and personal allowances are increased in line with the previous year's inflation.

Mr. Maude: Tax receipts would be expected to rise broadly in line with growth in the economy, perhaps a little faster because of a contribution from real fiscal drag. However, estimates of the effects of economic growth on individual taxes will depend, among other things, on the composition of that growth between the different sectors of the economy, and could be made only at disproportionate cost. Rising tax receipts, under resumed growth in the economy, are an element of the Government's medium-term fiscal projections, published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Projections of tax revenues are shown in FSBR table 2A.4.

Taxation

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the procedure for informing the next of kin about the tax position of the person who has died and when this procedure started.

Mr. Maude: There is no procedure for informing the next of kin about the tax position of a deceased person. This is because an individual's tax affairs are confidential. So when a person dies, the Inland Revenue discloses details of the deceased person's tax affairs only to his or her duly constituted legal personal representatives or persons authorised to act on their behalf. Next of kin very often become the legal personal representatives, but this is not always the case.

Value Added Tax

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many demands by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for alleged VAT arrears have been found to be incorrectly calculated in the last 12 months.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs and Excise does not maintain a record of incorrect demands for VAT arrears. In the year ended March 1991 approximately 35,000 final demand notices were issued each month for outstanding tax (including civil penalties, surcharge and interest) which had previously been declared by the registered trader as due (or assessed by Customs and Excise) and not paid. Each demand contains a paragraph advising the trader to contact Customs and Excise if they believe the amount demanded is not due or payment has already been made.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *10*.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* The only public opinion survey that the Treasury has been involved in is the "Share Ownership Survey 1991" which the NOP included on its random omnibus survey between 16 January and 11 February 1991. The cost of £28,780 was shared equally between the Treasury and the international stock exchange.

Foundation for Sport and the Arts

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table setting out the rate of football pools betting turnover for each of the past 10 years and the rate of pool betting turnover that would be required to provide *(a)* £75 million and *(b)* £70 million to the proposed foundation for sport and the arts, expressed (i) numerically and (ii) as a percentage increase.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 11 July 1991]:* Pools turnover (mostly on football pools) based on pool betting duty receipts in each of the last 10 financial years was:

Year	*Turnover £ million*
1981-82	443·8
1982-83	473·1
1983-84	486·4
1984-85	512·9
1985-86	553·5
1986-87	598·2
1987-88	647·5
1988-89	656·1
1989-90	714·7
1990-91	766·1

It is estimated that, to provide *(a)* £75 million and *(b)* £70 million to the proposed foundation for sport and the arts, chargeable turnover (ie not including the exempt donations by clients) would have to rise to *(a)* £1,000 million and *(b)* £933 million, representing increases of *(a)* 30·5 per cent. and *(b)* 21·8 per cent. over chargeable turnover for 1990-91.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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1st July—12th July 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A5
Road works 264w

A6
286w, 421w

A27
Road construction 174w

A44
Road works 191w

A55
145-6w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 666
Political refugees (02:07:91) 175

Aberdeen
168-70w

Abolition of Deer Hunting Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

Abolition of Political Honours Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Abolition of Warrant Sales (Scotland) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Abortion
456w
Scotland 130w
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 52-3w

Access to Personal Files (Social Services) (Amendment) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(08:07:91) 708

Accident insurance
Armed forces training 240w

Accidents
Severn bridge 140-1w, 420-1w

Accountants
Proceeds of crime 160w

Accounting
Insolvency Service 255w
Leasing industrial equipment 324w
NHS 411-2w
Pension funds 324w

Accounting Standards Board
324w

Accounting Standards Committee
324w

ACP countries
Health education 428w

Action for community employment
Northern Ireland 1073-4

Adley, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1104, 1108-9, 1118-9, 1128-37, 1143-4, 1148, 1160-3, 1185
European Council (01:07:91) 38
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 451-2
Railway Re-Openings (Tribunal) Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 616
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 271, 274-5
Questions
British Rail, Privatisation 11w
EC transport policy 290w
Lebanon, Armed forces deployment 253w
Noise control 938-9
Railway freight transport, EC countries 3

Administrative costs
Market information enquiry service 253-4w
Overseas status report service 253-4w

Advertising
Nuclear Electric 422w
Wales Tourist Board 629

Advertising agencies
Government contracts 87-8w, 358w, 364-5w

Advertising controls
Bingo 321w

Advisory Board for the Research Councils
Public expenditure 405w

Advisory Committee on Advertising
87-8w, 358-62w, 364-5w
Public appointments 357-8w

Africa
Disaster relief 520w
Food aid from UK 499w

"Agenda for Action on Continence Services"
408w

Aggregates
58w, 319-20w
Mining 220-1w

Agricultural & Food Research Council
Government research establishments 178-9w

Agricultural Development & Advisory Service
186w, 340-1w
Fees & charges 184w

Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Agricultural land
Environmentally sensitive areas 373w

Agricultural research
Set-aside schemes 520w

Agriculture
EC grants & loans 131w
Voluntary organisations 444w

AIDS
Inner city areas 406-7w
Inner London boroughs 406-7w
Leeds General Infirmary 47w
Pregnant women 507w
Scotland 271w, 346w

Aids for handicapped
Armed forces casualties 81w

AIDS in Scotland Task Force
271w

Air accidents
Low flying 79-80w

Air force
492-6w
Defence review 137-8w, 484w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 135w

Air force bases
480-2w
Civil servants 487w
US bases 134-5w

Air pollution
In-flight refuelling 211w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 211w

Air pollution control
Carbon dioxide 417w, 452w
Nitrogen oxides 91-2w

Air routes
Gibraltar 292w

Air targeting systems
240w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 239-40w
Tornado aircraft 239-40w

Air traffic control
France 11w
Gibraltar 84w

Air transport
EC action 12w
RAF Northolt 84w

Airguns
Public petitions (05:07:91) 545

Airlines
Employment protection 140w

Airports
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 450-8

Aitken, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Security vetting, Books 17

ALARM missiles
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 240w
Tornado aircraft 240w

Albania
Diplomatic relations 123w
Know-how Fund 123w

Alcoholism
Death 471w
Scotland 471w
Tower Hamlets 407w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Questions
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 953

Algae
Sea pollution 515-6w

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Debates etc.
Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 121-5, 127-30
Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 131-3, 137-9

All Party British American Parliamentary Group
300w

All Party British German Parliamentary Group
300w

All Party Franco-British Parliamentary Relations Committee
300w

All party groups
Government grants 300w

Allason, Mr Rupert
Questions
Coral, Environment protection 935

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 810, 813, 816
Questions
House of Commons times of sittings 44w

Alternative energy
Exhibitions 423-4w
United Nations 450w

Alton, Mr David
Questions
Community charge, Liverpool 936

Amateur arts
Theatre 15

Ambulance Council
120w

Ambulance services
Health service staff 120w

American Airlines
Conditions of employment 140w

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 517-8, 526-8
Vagrancy (Amendment) Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 620

Amess, Mr David*—*continued
Questions
Chief Inspector of Transport Security, Annual reports 353w
Police, Basildon 432

Amphibious vehicles
Warships 214w

Amusement arcades
Planning permission (01:07:91) 140-6

Anaesthetics
Dental services 409w

Ancient Forests Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (10:07:91) 968-70

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 874-8
Questions
Defective housing, Swansea 630-1

Anglian Water
380w

Anglo-Irish Agreement
286w

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference
(03:07:91) 319-27, 1079-80

Anglo-Irish talks
301w, 475-6w

Animal welfare
EC action 123w
Pets (05:07:91) 618
Veterinary medicine 153w

Animals
Injuries 98-9w

Antarctic
HMS Endurance 354w

Antisemitism
Romania 354w

Antitank missiles
Defence expenditure 212w

Antoncili, Samuel Thomas
Tenant harassment 277w

Appeals
Special education 402-3w

Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(10:07:91) 971-1058

Appropriations in aid
Northern Ireland (10:07:91) 971-1058

"Aquarius"
Poetry 16

Arab Industrial Organisation
Military attaches 136w

Arbuthnot, Mr James
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 566-7
European Council (01:07:91) 35
Power industry (02:07:91) 230
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 595-600
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 552-3, 557, 560-1, 563
Questions
Unemployment, EC countries 768

Area protection grant
58-64w

Armagh Four
476w, 1071

Armed forces
490-1w
Baltic republics of USSR 205w
Capital punishment 399-400w
Community charge 377w
Mental illness 143-4w
Racial harassment 132-3w, 485w

Armed forces casualties
158-9
Aids for handicapped 81w
Armed forces pensions 282w
Armed forces training 76w, 81w, 239w, 518w
Compensation 400w
Inquiries 239w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 484w

Armed forces deployment
78-80w
Iraq 78w
Kurdistan 134w, 152-3, 253w
Lebanon 253w
USA 520w

Armed forces discharges
Training 484w, 488w
Vocational guidance 484w

Armed forces married quarters
Empty housing 496w
Torpoint 496w

Armed forces officers
Armed forces strength 482w, 518w
Courts martial 215-6w

Armed forces pensions
Armed forces casualties 282w
Hicks, Adrian 81w, 282w

Armed forces recruitment
342w
Army 212w, 240w, 485w
Defence review 155-6
Scotland 133w
Territorial Army 133w

Armed forces strength
490-1w
Armed forces officers 482w, 518w
Army in Northern Ireland 239w
Defence expenditure 282w
Defence review 154-6

Armed forces training
Accident insurance 240w
Armed forces casualties 76w, 81w, 239w, 518w
Dartmoor National Park 144w
Defence review 155
France 400w
Safety measures 81w, 239w

Armed forces women
Navy 158

Armenian British School
439-40w

Armoured fighting vehicles
492w

Arms control
300w, 516w
CFE Treaty 483w

Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 872-94
Order relating to Com (05:07:91) 621

Arms control negotiations
643-4

Arms exports
Export licensing 430w

Arms trade
Iraq 149, 241-2w
Trade fairs 283w

Army
(01:07:91) 43-119, 135w, 485-7w, 490-1w
Armed forces recruitment 212w, 240w, 485w

Army Act 1955
Questions
Inquiries 76w

Army bases
489w

Army in Northern Ireland
Armed forces strength 239w

Army strength
135w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 673
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1106
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 364-5
Questions
Business statements 1100-1
Channel tunnel, Railway network 7
Community charge, Non-payment 936
Foreign investment in UK, Japan 158-9w

Arnold, Sir Thomas
Debates etc.
Olympic Games, Manchester (04:07:91) 537-9
Questions
China, USA 310w
Concert halls, Manchester 220w
Local government services, Contracts for services 434-5
Stockport bypass, Road construction 286w

Arts Council
16

Arts Council grants
North West region 15

Arts finance
English National Opera 176w
Greater London 4-5w
Orchestras 88w
Regional arts boards 14
Wales 5w

Asbestos
Ministry of Defence 77w

Asbestosis
War pensions 65w

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 26
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 775-6
EH101 helicopters, Defence procurement 147-8
Unemployment 438

Ashington Hospital
Clinical scientists 456w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 46, 83-5
European Council (01:07:91) 28
Questions
Asbestos, Ministry of Defence 77w
Asbestosis, War pensions 65w
Business statements 444
Disabled facilities grants 275-6w
Disabled facilities grants, Council tenants 275w
Disabled facilities grants, Expenditure 276w
Housing & handicapped, Carers 276w
Housing & handicapped, Housing construction 276w
Housing & handicapped, Housing improvement 276w
Local education authorities, Judgments 404w
Special education 403w
Special education, Appeals 402-3w
Special education, Departmental circulars 404w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack*—*continued
Special education, Local education authorities 402w
Special education, Schools & parents 403-4w

Asia
Refugees 157w

Aspinwall, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Trespass, Avon (02:07:91) 291-4

Assisted places scheme
125w

Association of British Chambers of Commerce
159w

Association of British Insurers
Codes of practice 429w

Astra Training Services
202w

Asylum Seekers & Refugees Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Ativan
Prescriptions 189w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Air traffic control, France 11w
Billing, Government departments 299w
European Security Conference 238w
Local Government Commission, Public appointments 318w

Attendance allowance
Fylde 398w
Terminal care 151w

Attorney General
Opinion polls 424w

Audit
Accountability 254w
Fraud 430w
Professional organisations 17w, 254w, 521w

Auditing Practices Board
Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies 324w
Disclosure of information 18w

Average earnings
Wales 191w

Avon
Training 350w
Trespass (02:07:91) 291-8

Axle weights
Goods vehicles 174-5w

Ayrshire
(03:07:91) 414-20

Badgers
Nature conservation (05:07:91) 566-93

Badgers Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (05:07:91) 566-93

Bailiffs
Fees & charges 179w

Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth*, *Secretary of State for the Home Department
Debates etc.
Political refugees, Ministerial statements (02:07:91) 165-78
Prison escapes, Ministerial statements (08:07:91) 649-59
Questions
Civil defence 391-4w
Civil service agencies, Home Office 390w
Crime 430
"Disability Manifesto", Home Office 149w
Guildford Four Inquiry 209w

Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth*—*continued
Immigration applications , Primary purpose rule 424-5
Police 430-1
Police, Manpower 430
Police, West Yorkshire 206w
Police custody, Time limits 150w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, Rights of accused 248w
Publicity, Home Office 4w, 391-2w, 436w
Special constables 431
Telephone tapping 428
Telephones, Home Office 248w

Baker Committee
see National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People

Balance of trade
Food 21w
Information technology 159w

Baldry, Mr Tony*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment
Questions
Biotechnology, International conferences 416w
Birds, EC law 313-4w
Contaminated land registers, Government grants to local authorities 90-1w
Coral, Environment protection 935
Dog wardens 380w
Domestic wastes, Recycling 96w
Greenhouse effect 379-80w
Hazardous wastes, EC countries 92w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 141w
Hazardous wastes, Incinerators 413w
Inland waterways, Water pollution 95w
Integrated pollution control 91w
Low Level Waste Disposal 276w
Nitrates, Water pollution 524w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution control 91-2w
Peat bogs, Sites of special scientific interest 222w
Persian Gulf, Environment protection 934-5
RAMSAR Convention, Thorne moors 417w
Recycling, EC countries 382-3w
River Lea, River pollution 382w
Sewage, Odour pollution 220w
Water pollution 383w
Water supply industry, Income 524w
Water treatment, Nuclear reactors 525w

Baltic republics of USSR
Armed forces 205w

Bangladesh
Overseas aid 22w, 260-1w

Bank loans
424-5w

Bank of Credit & Commerce International
257-8w, 522w, 642-3, 763, 775-6, 1079, 1083-4
Bury Borough Council 941
CCL Assurance 522w
Local authorities 939-40, 944, 948
Ministerial statements (08:07:91) 660-74

Bank of England
(08:07:91) 660-74

Bank services
Social security payments 152w

Banks
Small businesses 299w, 303-4

Banks, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 50
Questions
Local government reform 55w
Trade unions 774

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 577, 580, 582-4, 587-9, 592-3
British Racing Commission Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 619
Commonwold (12:07:91) 1242
European Council (01:07:91) 34-5
Football Spectators Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 620
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 835, 837-44, 847-9, 851-3, 863-5
Ministerial statements, Points of order (02:07:91) 180
Oral question time intervention (08:07:91) 646
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 658
Questions
Armed forces, Racial harassment 132-3w
Arts finance, Greater London 4w
Business statements 1100
Civil service, Lie detectors 507w
Compact discs, Prices 300
Hereditary peers 775
Overseas aid, Nature conservation 259w
Security vetting, Books 16-7
Serious Fraud Office 642-3
Urban programme, Expenditure 57w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1042-6
European Council (01:07:91) 34
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 372-5
Power industry (02:07:91) 239, 259-60
Restoration of the Franchise Bill, 1R (09:07:91) 777
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Kurdistan 152-3
Arms trade, Trade fairs 283w
Business statements 448, 1089
Civil service, Disabled workers 18-9
Community relations, Northern Ireland 1076
Kurdistan, Overseas aid 370-2w
Local authorities, Official meetings 275w
Northern Ireland Railways, Terrorism 476w
Railway electrification, Investment 10w
Steroid drugs, Drug abuse 310w
Steroid drugs, Prosecutions 335w

Barnet
Voluntary schools 303-4w

Barristers
Evidence 640-1

Barron, Mr Kevin
Questions
Coal, Dumping 86w
Electricity generation 244w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Administrative delays 37-8w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Finance 38w
Local government constituencies, Rotherham 524w
Local government services, Competition 380-1w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 38w
Non-fossil fuel obligation, Finance 38w

Basildon
Police 432

Basildon Link
181w

Bass
Government assistance 279w, 522w

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 671-2
Questions
Foreign investment in UK 311

Batiste, Mr Spencer—continued
Tanks, Defence procurement 479w

Battered wives
Government grants to voluntary organisations 150w

Battle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 197
Questions
Concessionary television licences 422-3
Crime 208w
Employment training 68w
Employment training, Surveys 68w
Epilepsy, Health services 411w
Family credit, Social security benefits disqualification 397w
Family credit, Social security benefits rules 398-9w
Income support, Mortgages 328w
Leeds General Infirmary, AIDS 47w
NHS charges 46w
Pension funds, Tax allowances 365w
Residential care, Hospital discharges 327-8w
Retirement pensions, Northern Ireland 125w
Tax yields, Economic growth 525-6w
Taxpayers, Personal income 9w

BBC
210w, 321w

Beaches
Water pollution 380w

Beaumont-Dark, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 667-8
Calling of Members, Points of order (03:07:91) 336-7
European Council (01:07:91) 37
Power industry (02:07:91) 239, 252-4
Questions
Employment level, Pay settlements 350w
Minimum wage 433-4

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 972, 975-6, 981, 991, 994, 998, 1020, 1036-40
Questions
International investments, Company liquidations 375-6w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 1074

Beith, Mr A J
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1104, 1120, 1147-53
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1203-6
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 897
Questions
Ashington Hospital, Clinical scientists 456w
Economic recession 302
House of Commons, Flowers 211w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 129w
Local government expenditure, Wales 34w
Local government revenue 95-6w
Local government revenue, Scotland 375w
Local government revenue, Wales 34w
Non-domestic rates 142w
Parliamentary Works Office, Recruitment 337w
Philippines, Thomas Cook 123-4w
Unemployment 768-9

Belfast Prison
Prison escapes 511-2w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 567, 577-8, 583, 587
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1123, 1125-6

Bellingham, Mr Henry—continued
European Council (01:07:91) 38
Hare Coursing Bill, Rep adjourned (05:07:91) 613-4
Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 620
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 326
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 594-5, 604-8
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 555
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 333
Questions
Beaches, Water pollution 380w
Business statements 1096-7
Medicines Control Agency, Civil service agencies 409w
Satellite broadcasting, Planning permission 385-6w
Zhongliang, Bishop 419w

Bellotti, Mr David
Questions
A27, Road construction 174w
Community charge capping 942
Inland Revenue, Civil service manpower 299w
Parish councils, Election expenses 413w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 950
Residential care, Mentally ill 329w
Standard spending assessments, Census of population 272w
Uniform business rate, Hotels 297-8w, 383w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 27
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 325
Questions
Members' Interests Select Committee, Select Committee evidence 17

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1108, 1111, 1163-7
Environment (12:07:91) 1217, 1226, 1259, 1273-6
Housing estates (10:07:91) 961
Questions
Channel tunnel, Greater Manchester 4-5
Countryside premium scheme 186w
Countryside stewardship scheme, Expenditure 946
Health & Safety Executive, Transport of hazardous materials 293w
Minimum wage 435
Training, Stockport 348w

Bennett, Mr Nicholas, Under-Secretary of State for Wales
Questions
British Dental Association, Wales 387w
Childbirth, Wales 190w
Council house sales, Wales 508-10w
Defective housing, Swansea 630-1
Dental health, Research finance 386w
Dental health, Schools 385w
Dental health, Wales 385w, 387w
Dental services, Ministers' domestic visits 448w
Dental services, Schools 312w, 385-6w
Dental services, Surgery 387w
Dioxins, Pontypool 263-4w
"Disability Manifesto", Welsh Office 449-50w
Fluoridation, Wales 386-7w
Gypsies, Gresford 229w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 444w
Health services, West Wales 261w
Heart diseases, Wales 262w
HIV infection, Dentists 388w
HIV infection, Wales 229w

Bennett, Mr Nicholas—continued
Homelessness, Wales 445-6w
Hospital closures, Wales 230w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 633
Hospitals, South Glamorgan Health Authority 631-2
Housing, Swansea 631
Housing construction, Wales 446w
Housing for Wales, Government grants 447w
Housing for Wales, Public appointments 447w
Local government expenditure, Wales 34w
Local government revenue, Wales 34w
NHS, Wales 632-3
NHS administration, Wales 146w
NHS trusts, Wales 640
Nursing homes, Health services 263w
Planning appeals, Wales 34-6w
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff 632
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff, Operating theatres 507-8w
South Glamorgan Health Authority 632
Trawsfynydd power station, Pollution monitoring 448w
Trawsfynydd power station, Radiation hazards 192-4w
Trawsfynydd power station, Water storage 193-4w

Bentley, Derek
215-6w
Miscarriages of justice 321w

Benyon, Mr W
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1241

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1240
Questions
Business statements 445
Prisoners' transfers, Treaties 435w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 955

Bevan, Mr David Gilroy
Questions
Crime prevention panels, Young offenders 433w
EC Social Charter 768

Biffen, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 330-1
Questions
Business statements 1091

Bilateral aid
368-9w
Nicaragua 260w

Billing
Companies 316
Government departments 245w, 299w

Bingo
Advertising controls 321w

Biotechnology
International conferences 416w

Birds
EC law 313-4w
Fishing gear 162w
Import of live animals 162w, 217w, 371-2w
Pest control 466-8w

Birmingham
462-4w
Inner cities initiative 224w

Blackburn, Dr John G
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 912-3

Blair, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 796, 799-800, 823-6
Questions
Industrial training 771-2

Blair, Mr Tony*—*continued
Minimum wage 771
Working hours, EC law 154w

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 25-6
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 452
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 331

Blind
Handicapped students 178w

Blood transfusion services
120w
Fees & charges 120w

Blue ear pig disease
163w
Disease control 74w, 340w, 444w
Lincoln 73w
Wales 190w

Blunkett, Mr David
Questions
Area protection grant 58-64w
Community charge benefits 181w
Immigration applications, Pakistan 163w
Local government finance 95w
Local government staff, Political activities 94w
Sheffield Development Corporation, Employment opportunities 221w
Social security benefits rates, Young people 67w
VAT, Income 176w

Body, Sir Richard
Questions
Food, Balance of trade 21w

Bomb disposal
Technical assistance 142-3w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 566-9, 574-82, 584-5, 592-3
Hare Coursing Bill, Rep adjourned (05:07:91) 612-5
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 599-603, 608-9, 611
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 549, 555-61
Questions
Railway freight transport 289w
Road accidents, Death 288-9w

Books
Security vetting 16-7

Boscawen, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 72
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 584-5, 590
Questions
Defence review, Armed forces training 155

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 128
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1240
Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 135-6
Environment (12:07:91) 1222-5
European Council (01:07:91) 40-1
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 678-9, 682, 684-5, 688-9, 695, 703-4, 706, 708
Questions
Advertising agencies, Government contracts 87-8w, 358w, 364-5w
Advisory Committee on Advertising 358-62w
Advisory Committee on Advertising, Public appointments 357-8w
Brook Hospital 117w, 165w
Budget, Disclosure of information 310w
Building societies, Taxation 256-8w, 525w, 1082-3

Bottomley, Mr Peter*—*continued
Child benefit 329w
Child benefit, Statistics 122w, 218w
Drinking & driving, Death 139w
Islands, Northern Ireland 125w
One parent families, Statistics 219w
Ports, Rathlin Island 26-7w
Road accidents, EC countries 12-4w
Rural areas, Northern Ireland 231w
Standard spending assessments, One parent families 273w
Transplant surgery, Northern Ireland 107-8
Woolwich Building Society, Taxation 88w, 297w, 425w

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia, Minister of State, Department of Health
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 531-5
Questions
Abortion 456w
AIDS, Inner city areas 406-7w
AIDS, Pregnant women 507w
Ambulance services, Health service staff 120w
Ashington Hospital, Clinical scientists 456w
Ativan, Prescriptions 189w
Battered wives, Government grants to voluntary organisations 150w
Breast feeding 186w
Child care, EC action 506w
Childbirth, Costs 279-80w
Community care, Elderly 117-8w
Dietary foods, Prescriptions 119-20w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Health 226-8w
Drugs, Patents 45w
Duromine, Drug side effects 410w
Health service staff, Community care 331w
Health service staff, Manpower 329w
Health visitors 225-6w
HIV infection 165w
HIV infection, Screening 506-7w
Hospital waiting lists 46w, 118w
Hospital waiting lists, East Birmingham Health Authority 54w
Leeds General Infirmary, AIDS 47w
Local government social services 280w
Medical services committees, Public appointments 118-9w
Menopause, Surveys 117w
NHS administration, Manpower 337w
NHS charges 46w
NHS review 280w
NHS trusts 330w, 408w
Nurses, Professional qualifications 455-6w
Nurses, Recruitment 456w
Nurses' training 456w
Nurses' training, Professional qualifications 46-7w
Occupational health, Nurses 329-30w
Old people's homes, Tower Hamlets 330w
Project 2000, Student grants 165w
Residential care, Elderly 51w
Residential care, Local government social services 333-4w
Residential care, Mentally ill 329w
Residential care of children, Local authorities 505-6w
RU486, Clinical trials 225w
RU486, Licensing 280w
Sickle cell disease 115-6w
Steroid drugs, Prosecutions 335w

Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary constituencies 106-7w
Public appointments 107w

Boundary commissions
Local government constituencies 220w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
216-7w, 250-2w
Northern Ireland 285w
Scotland 195w

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Airguns, Public petitions (05:07:91) 545
Questions
Hong Kong 520-1w

Bowden, Mr Andrew*—*continued
Hospital discharges, Codes of practice 504w
Income support, Residential care 217-8w, 246w
Residential care, Local government social services 333-4w
Retirement age 389w
Sheltered housing, Leasehold housing 93w

Bowden, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1107, 1132, 1145, 1153-5, 1178
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1243
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 9-10
Health service staff, Manpower 505w
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 325-6w

Bowis, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 40
RU486, Points of order (01:07:91) 42
Questions
Armenian British School 439-40w
Funerals 306-7
National Curriculum Council, Public appointments 406w
Railway stations, Crimes of violence 422w
Railway stations, Railway workers 421-2w

Bows & arrows
Public petitions (05:07:91) 545

Boxer system
Costs 400w
Planning authorities 400-1w

Boyes, Mr Roland
Questions
Navy, Armed forces women 158

Bradford
Racial harassment 149w

Bradford-on-Tone
Railway accidents 84w

Bradley, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 202-4
Questions
Voluntary organisations, Local government expenditure 417-9w

Braille
Educational assessment 126w, 178w
General certificate of secondary education 101w
Handicapped students 153w

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Questions
Business statements 441

Brandon-Bravo, Mr Martin M
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1106
Questions
City Challenge, Nottingham 934
Training, Young people 764-5

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Dalzell platemill, Points of order (01:07:91) 42
Ministers' domestic visits, Points of order (04:07:91) 461
Steel industry (04:07:91) 483-6, 488
Questions
Advisory Board for the Research Councils, Public expenditure 405w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 69, 116-7
Questions
Ministry of Defence, Higher civil servants 482w

Brazier, Mr Julian—continued
Rapid deployment forces, Defence review 150

Breast feeding
186w

Brewing industry
Public houses 19w, 311w

Bridging allowances
Youth training 466w

Bristol
Ministry of Defence 240w

British Aid for the Kurds
370-2w

British Coal Corporation
86w
Privatisation 162-3

British Dental Association
Wales 387w

British Horse Society
1074-5

British Library
Construction 90w

British National Party
Racial incitement 173w

British National Space Centre
356-7w

British Nationality (Amendment) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

British Nuclear Fuels
School governors 438w

British Nuclear Test Veterans' Association
6w

British Racing Commission Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

British Rail
1-3, 10w, 289w
Privatisation 11w, 12

British Railways Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (02:07:91) 147, (04:07:91) 421, (11:07:91) 1067
Order to proceed in next Session (09:07:91) 759-60, (10:07:91) 930, (11:07:91) 1068

British Railways Board
(04:07:91) 458, (11:07:91) 1102-206

British Railways Board (Finance) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (04:07:91) 458
Order relating to Com (05:07:91) 621
2R, Money res* & Rem stages (11:07:91) 1102-206

British Railways (No 3) Bill (HL) 1989/90
Debates etc.
2R order read (04:07:91) 421, (11:07:91) 1067
Order to proceed in next Session (09:07:91) 759

British residents abroad
Greece 354-5w
Kuwait 124w, 253w

British Steel Corporation
(04:07:91) 460-536
Dalzell 375w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 309-10
Scotland 375w

Brixton Prison
Fresh start 513w
Prison escapes (08:07:91) 649-59, 774-5

Brixton Prison Escapes Inquiry
(08:07:91) 649-59

Broadcasting
210w

Broadcasting licences
Channel Three 206w
Commercial television 426-7

Brook Hospital
117w, 165w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland, Ministerial statements (03:07:91) 319-27
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference 1079-80
Anglo-Irish talks 301w, 475-6w
Civil service agencies, Northern Ireland 144w
Conservative Party, Northern Ireland government 477w
Northern Ireland, Legislation 1071
Northern Ireland government 475-6w, 1069-71
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 376w, 1069
Northern Ireland Railways, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 144-5w
Police Authority for Northern Ireland 1072
Royal Ulster Constabulary 1073
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 1071-3

Brown, Mr Gordon
Questions
Economic recession 303

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 463, 465, 486-9
Questions
Business statements 1099
Electrical Electronic Telecommunication & Plumbing Union, Minimum wage 349w
Inflation 308
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Humberside 379w

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Property development, Newcastle upon Tyne 277w
Tax allowances 7w
Tax allowances, Tax yields 8w
Taxpayers, Personal income 5-8w
Taxpayers, Tax rates & bands 6w

Brown, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 403-4
Questions
Army 135w
Coal mining, EC grants & loans 308
Dock labour scheme, Leith 769-70
Turkey, Refugees 153
Uniform business rate, Non-payment 206w, 933

Browne, Mr John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 47-8, 107-10
Members' dress, Points of order (04:07:91) 458
Questions
Armed forces 490-1w
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 400w
Armed forces casualties, Inquiries 239w
Armed forces strength 490-1w
Armed forces strength, Defence expenditure 282w
Army 491w
Army, Armed forces recruitment 240w
Army in Northern Ireland, Armed forces strength 239w
Business statements 1089
Companies, Billing 316
Hicks, Adrian, Armed forces pensions 282w
USSR, Emigration 215w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 65, 85-7
Questions
Child Support Agency 461w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 153-4
Dog wardens 380w
Dogs 207w
Labour Party, Defence 1083
Non-domestic rates 949-50

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1196-202
Steel industry (04:07:91) 473, 479-83
Questions
Defence land, Vacant land 134w

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 326
Questions
Business statements 448
Immigration applications, Primary purpose rule 424-5
Northern Ireland, Legislation 1071

Budget
Disclosure of information 310w

Budgeting
Family doctors 164w, 270w
School administration 436-7w

Building Regulations Advisory Committee
Fire regulations 147-8w

Building repairs
NHS 500-4w

Building societies
Loans 424-5w
Taxation 256-8w, 525w, 1082-3

Building Societies Act 1986 (Continuance of Section 41) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 290

Building Societies Act 1986 (Modifications) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(03:07:91) 339

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 40
Low incomes (09:07:91) 786, 796, 809-13, 820-1
Power industry (02:07:91) 232, 236
Questions
Cardiff Bay barrage 634
Council tax, Public opinion 947-8
Defence procurement 148
EC social policy, EC law 350w
Foreign companies in UK 299
Jobclubs, Chelmsford 763
Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line, Investment 11w
Meat, Food contamination 443w
Non-statutory training organisations 295-6w

Burt, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 518, 521-5
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 658
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Local authorities 944

Bury Borough Council
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 941

Bury St Edmunds
74w

Bus services
Greater London 10w
Handicapped 290w

Bus services—continued
Surveys 15w

"Bus Strategy for London Consultation Paper"
290w

Buses
Greater London 15w

Business motions
(05:07:91) 621, (09:07:91) 868
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:07:91) 732, (09:07:91) 868

Business questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (04:07:91) 441, 446, 449

Business statements
439-49, 1085-101

Butcher, Mr John
Questions
Domestic accidents, Death 522w
School administration, Budgeting 436-7w
Technical education 436

Butler, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 401-2
Questions
Bass, Government assistance 279w, 522w
British Rail, Privatisation 12
Cardiff Bay, Employment opportunities 633
Community charge, Debt collection 377w
Foreign investment in UK, USA 301
Hospital waiting lists 46w
Incontinence, Health services 408w
Juries 247w
"Laboratories in the 1990's" 40-1w
NHS administration, Manpower 337w, 374w
NHS administration, Wales 146w
NHS complaints 334w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Privatisation 477w
Nuclear physics, Daresbury 39-40w, 178w, 223-4w, 439w
Nuclear physics, Public sector assets 40w
Prisoners, Drugs 148w
Science & Engineering Research Council, Capital investment 436w
Science & Engineering Research Council, International cooperation 40-1w
Science & Engineering Research Council, Nuclear physics 40w
Theatre, Amateur arts 15
Warrington Health Authority, Per capita costs 45-6w

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 32
Low incomes (09:07:91) 788, 790, 797
Questions
Blind, Handicapped students 178w
Braille, Handicapped students 153w
Business statements 1097
Minimum wage 768, 775

By elections
Militant tendency 436

Bypasses
287-8w, (08:07:91) 734-58

Caledonian forest
Forest protection 344w
Woodland grant scheme 344w

Caledonian MacBrayne Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Calling of Members
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:07:91) 25, (02:07:91) 178, (03:07:91) 316, 325-7, 336-8, (04:07:91) 449, 451, 497, (10:07:91) 963

Cambodia
645-6

Campaign for Tax Relief on Child Care
299w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 881-2
Army (01:07:91) 74-7
Steel industry (04:07:91) 472-3, 501
Questions
Air force 492-6w
Armoured fighting vehicles 492w
Army 485-7w
Defence review, Armed forces recruitment 155-6
Nuclear submarines, Telecommunications technology 492w
Sonar, Defence procurement 491-2w
Tornado aircraft 496w
Warships, Shipbuilding 495w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Family doctors, Budgeting 164w

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 52-4
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 668, 673, 674
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Points of order (09:07:91) 780
Banks, Points of order (10:07:91) 966
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1103
European Council (01:07:91) 32
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 358, 360, 367-9, 378
Questions
Business statements 1096
Health Care Corporation, Legal costs 245w
Higher civil servants, Civil service manpower 257-8w
Inward, North West region 355-6w
Nurses, Professional qualifications 455-6w
Nurses, Recruitment 456w
Nurses' training 456w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 954
Regional aid, Development areas 159w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 365-7
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 326
Questions
Business statements 1095
Local enterprise companies, Forth Valley 513-4w

Capital investment
School buildings 386w
Science & Engineering Research Council 436w
Voluntary schools 177w

Capital movements
87w

Capital punishment
Armed forces 399-400w

Car allowances
176w

Car industry
West Midlands 306

Caravan sites
Environmental impact assessment 229w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 417w, 452w

Cardiff Airport
509-10w

Cardiff Bay
633-4
Employment opportunities 633

Cardiff Bay barrage
(03:07:91) 338, 447w, 633-5

Cardiff Bay Barrage (No 2) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (03:07:91) 338

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
228w, (03:07:91) 338

Cardiff Institute of Higher Education
Social workers' training 497-8w

Care assessment
Elderly 117-8w

Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991
Debates etc.
(01:07:91) 121-30

Carers
Housing & handicapped 276w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Questions
Agriculture, EC grants & loans 131w
Albania, Diplomatic relations 123w
Albania, Know-how Fund 123w
Craft industries, Wales 31-2w
Immigrant doctors, Mutual recognition of qualifications 119w
Local government reform, Wales 263w
Medical services committees, Public appointments 118-9w
Trading standards departments, Wales 31w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 190
Questions
General Motors 301

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces
Questions
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 153-4
Frigates, Shipbuilding 214w
HMS Challenger, Decommissioning 283w
HMS Onslaught, Decommissioning 281w
Low flying, Air accidents 80w
Low flying, Complaints 133w
Minesweepers, Shipbuilding 214w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service dispersal 240w
Ministry of Defence police, Relocation of employees 517w
Navy, Armed forces women 158
Navy, Shipbuilding 158
Nuclear submarines 213-4w
Nuclear submarines, Defence procurement 213w
Opinion polls, Ministry of Defence 489w
RAE Bedford, Property transfer 77w
RAF Leeming, Low flying 399w
RAF Leeming, Tornado aircraft 399w
RAF St Athan, Pay 152
Royal ordnance factories, Ministry of Defence police 143w
Sonar, Defence procurement 491-2w
Warships 157-8
Warships, Amphibious vehicles 214w
Warships, Shipbuilding 495w

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1244
European Council (01:07:91) 31
Questions
Civil servants' secondment, EC institutions 18
Crown Prosecution Service 641
Gabon, Diplomatic relations 300-1w
Metrication, EC law 99w
Serious Fraud Office, Annual reports 353w

Cars
Children 13w

Cartwright, Mr John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 105-7
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 656

***Cartwright, Mr John**—continued*
Questions
Antonelli, Samuel Thomas, Tenant harassment 277w
Chipmunk aircraft, Operating costs 517w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 154
East London river crossing, Environment protection 16w
Guided weapons, Defence procurement 400w
Standard spending assessments, Greenwich 272w
Trade union officials, Training 201w

Cash, Mr William
Questions
Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 130w
Public contracts 312-3

Castleford Normanton & District Hospital
Public petitions (10:07:91) 1059

Cat Protection League
(05:07:91) 545

Category A prisoners
(08:07:91) 649-59

Cattewater Reclamation Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 147

CCL Assurance
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 522w
Company investigations 522w

Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991
Questions
334w

Census of population
Sleeping rough 334w
Standard spending assessments 272w

Centenary Theatre Group
15

Central Office of Information
87-8w

Centre for Applied Microbiology & Research
337w, 458w

Centre for Policy Studies
Annual reports 297w

Cereals
443w

Certification Officer
National Union of Mineworkers 640-1

CFE Treaty
(01:07:91) 43-119, 354w, (09:07:91) 872-94
Arms control 483w
Disclosure of information 520w
USSR 419w

Chahal, Karamji Singh
432

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Scope of debate (11:07:91) 1203

***Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda**, Minister for Overseas Development*
Questions
ACP countries, Health education 428w
Africa, Food aid from UK 499w
Asia, Refugees 157w
Bangladesh, Overseas aid 22w, 260-1w
Bilateral aid 368-9w
Cambodia 645-6
Developing countries 644-5
Developing countries, Government 645
Developing countries, Overseas aid 260w
EC aid 259w
Ethiopia, Food aid 498-9w
Foreign aid, EC countries 259w
Gabon, Diplomatic relations 300-1w

***Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda**—continued*
Horn of Africa, Overseas aid 259w
Iraq, Disaster relief 429w
Iraq, Health aid 260w
Iraq, Overseas aid 428w
Kenya Wildlife Trust, Upper Waiting Hall 498w
Kurdistan, Overseas aid 370-2w
Malawi, Human rights 428w
Mozambique, Food aid 499w
Natural Resources Institute 369-70w
Nicaragua, Bilateral aid 260w
Overseas aid, Construction 368w
Overseas aid, Environment protection 427w
Overseas aid, Nature conservation 259w
Philippines, Disaster relief 122w
Rain forests, Forest protection 326w
South Africa, EC external relations 24-5w
South Africa, Overseas aid 646-7
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 325-6w
Sudan, Disaster relief 499w
World Bank, Annual reports 428w
Zimbabwe, Ministers' visits abroad 259-60w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 644

Challenger tanks
479w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel Three
Broadcasting licences 206w

Channel tunnel
Greater Manchester 4-5
Railway freight transport 2-3, 9-10, 10w, 11
Railway network 7-8, 10w, 11, 236w
Rolling stock 173-4w

Chapel-en-le-Frith/Whaley Bridge bypass
Construction costs 421w

Chelmsford
Jobclubs 763

Chemical industries
Hazardous wastes 234w
Northern Ireland 1078

Chemical weapons
Iraq 124-5w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 342w

Chemicals
Health hazards 336w
Sheep dipping 73w

Chief Inspector of Transport Security
Annual reports 353w

Child benefit
246w, 329w
Statistics 122w, 218w

Child care
EC action 506w
Fife 237w
Inquiries 237w
Tax allowances 299w

Child Support Agency
461w

Childbirth
117w
Costs 279-80w
Wales 190w

Children
Cars 13w
Deaf (11:07:91) 1207-14
Road accidents 5

China
Greenhouse effect 450w
Political prisoners 419w
Textiles 305
USA 310w

Chipmunk aircraft
Operating costs 517w

***Chope, Mr Christopher**, Under-Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 752-8
Manchester Airport (10:07:91) 1063-6
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 675-7, 681-4, 686-91, 694-702, 706-7
Questions
A27, Road construction 174w
Bypasses 287-8w
Cars, Children 13w
Chapel-en-le-Frith/Whaley Bridge bypass, Construction costs 421w
Cycleways, Greater London 289w
Cycling, Road safety 5-6
Drinking & driving, Death 139w
East London river crossing, Environment protection 16w
Goods vehicles, Axle weights 174-5w
Humber Bridge Board, Debts 6
M4, Road accidents 11w
M40, Construction materials 175w
M40, Motorway service areas 309w
M62, Road works 174w
Maidstone bypass, Road works 421w
Motor vehicles, Energy conservation 16w
Motorcycles, Driving instruction 15w
Motorways, Environmental impact assessment 139w, 421w
Police vehicles, Lighting 322w
Priority routes, Leyton 16w
Rear seat belts 14w
Road accidents, Children 5
Road accidents, Death 288-9w
Road accidents, EC countries 12-4w
Road accidents, Pedestrians 5
Road accidents, Speed limits 6
Road construction, Weston-super-Mare 498w
Road signs 16w
Road traffic control, Road accidents 309-10w
Road traffic offences, Statistics 287w
Roads, Scotland 12w
Safety belts, Goods vehicles 308-9w
Severn bridge, Accidents 140-1w, 420-1w
Severn bridge, Debts 309w
Severn bridge, Interest charges 309w
Speed governors, Lorries 174w, 287w
Stockport bypass, Road construction 286w
Transport 2000, Conferences 13w
Transport of hazardous materials, Explosives 289w

Chronically sick
Hospital discharges 188w

Church of England
(01:07:91) 121-30, 131-3, 137-9

Circle line
Investment 420w

City Challenge
181-2w, 384w, 524-5w, 934
Finance 384w
Nottingham 934
Wolverhampton 933-4

City grants
56w

City technology colleges
401-2w
Cleveland 401w
Haberdashers' Aske's School 438w

Civil & Marine Limited
76w

Civil defence
391-4w
Wyre Forest 249w

Civil emergency adviser
391-4w

Civil servants
Air force bases 487w

Civil servants' secondment
EC institutions 6w, 18

Civil service
Disabled workers 18-9
Job satisfaction 5w
Lie detectors 507w
London allowance 364-6w

Civil service agencies
17-8
Annual reports 298-9w, 397w
Civil service manpower 327-8w
Day care of children 298w, 328w
Finance 420w
Higher civil servants 460w
Home Office 390w
Medicines Control Agency 409w
Northern Ireland 144w
Pay incentives 298w, 459w
Performance indicators 298w, 397w
Publicity 459w
Scottish Office 130w
Social security benefits 18
Working hours 257w, 327w

Civil service dispersal
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate 153-4
Ministry of Defence 240w

Civil service manpower
Civil service agencies 327-8w
Defence review 213w
Dept of Education & Science 402w
Dept of Social Security 327-8w
Glamorgan 426-7w
Gwent 426-7w
Higher civil servants 257-8w
Inland Revenue 299w
Nuclear safety 348w
Public relations 19-20
Unemployment benefits 71w

Civil service redundancies
Ministry of Defence 483w

Clark, Rt Hon Alan, Minister of State for Defence Procurement
Questions
Air force bases, Civil servants 487w
Antitank missiles, Defence expenditure 212w
Arab Industrial Organisation, Military attaches 136w
Armoured fighting vehicles 492w
Arms trade, Iraq 149, 241-2w
Arms trade, Trade fairs 283w
Boxer system, Costs 400w
Boxer system, Planning authorities 400-1w
Defence industries 147-8
Defence industries, Redundancy 148-9, 518-9w
Defence land, Scotland 80w
Defence procurement 148
Defence review, Defence expenditure 212w
Defence review, Defence industries 133w, 212w
Defence review, Trade associations 213w
EH101 helicopters, Defence procurement 147-8
Helicopters, Defence procurement 479-80w
International Military Services 242w
International Military Services, Company liquidations 483w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Air targeting systems 239-40w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, ALARM missiles 240w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service redundancies 483w
Nuclear submarines, Telecommunications technology 492w
Tanks, Defence procurement 479w
Telephones, Ministry of Defence 283w
Tornado aircraft 496w
Trident 134w

Clark, Dr David
Questions
Agricultural & Food Research Council, Government research establishments 178-9w
Agricultural Development & Advisory Service, Fees & charges 184w

Clark, Dr David—continued
Agriculture, Voluntary organisations 444w
Blue ear pig disease 163w
Blue ear pig disease, Disease control 74w, 340w, 444w
Blue ear pig disease, Lincoln 73w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 250-2w
Cereals 443w
Countryside stewardship scheme 182w
Dioxins, Incinerators 132w
Dioxins, Milk 75w, 132w, 339w
Farms, Pollution control 340-1w
Food industry, Manpower 202-4w
Irradiated food, Food labelling 341w
North York Moors National Park, Farms 186w
Pesticides, Licensing 252w
Set-aside schemes 442w
Set-aside schemes, Agricultural research 520w
Set-aside schemes, Expenditure 441-2w
Set-aside schemes, Inspections 442w
Set-aside schemes, Scotland 474-5w
Set-aside schemes, Take-up 475w
Set-aside schemes, Wales 446w
Toxocara canis 181w
Trawsfynydd power station, Pollution monitoring 448w
Veterinary Investigation Service 183-6w
Veterinary Investigation Service, Construction 74w
Veterinary Investigation Service, Salmonella 74w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, Secretary of State for Education & Science
Questions
Armenian British School 439-40w
Languages education, Curriculum 440w
National Curriculum Council, Public appointments 406w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 463, 477-8, 489-90
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 331
Questions
Community care, Local government expenditure 342w
Mental illness specific grant, Scotland 342w

Cleeland, Paul
Sentencing 434-6w

Cleveland
City technology colleges 401w

Clinical scientists
Ashington Hospital 456w

Clinical Standards Advisory Group
186-7w

Clinical trials
RU486 225w

Clinical wastes
Infectious diseases 470w
Scotland 374w, 469-70w

Clinics
Johnstone 128w

Clwyd
Pre-School Playgroups' Association 311w

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 347-52
Questions
Developing countries 644-5
Guyana, Elections 24w
Philippines, Disaster relief 122w

Coal
Dumping 86w

Coal Imports Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Coal mining
EC grants & loans 308
Pay 244w

Coal mining—continued
Redundancy 265w

Codes of practice
Association of British Insurers 429w
Funerals 307
Hospital discharges 504w

Cohabitation (Contract Enforcement) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 884-6, 891
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 835-6, 841, 850-65
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 604
Welfare of Calves (Export) Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 617
Questions
Abortion 456w
Antitank missiles, Defence expenditure 212w
Billing, Government departments 245w
Birds, Fishing gear 162w
Breast feeding 186w
CFE Treaty 354w
CFE Treaty, Disclosure of information 520w
Childbirth 117w
Childbirth, Wales 190w
Community charge 245w
Coordinating Committee on Export Controls 305
Defence, Germany 135w
Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 429w
Hospital waiting lists 505w
House of Commons, Flowers 211w
International Military Services, Company liquidations 483w
Local government finance, Orders & regulations 377w
Mercenaries, Treaties 22w
Ministry of Defence police, Relocation of employees 517w
Motorways, Environmental impact assessment 139w, 421w
Police national computer 103w
Police national computer, Data networks 102w
Police national computer, Disclosure of information 103-5w
Police national computer, Missing persons 102w
Police national computer, Motor vehicle theft 105w
Police national computer, Northern Ireland 144w
Police national computer, Police records 104w
Police records 102-3w
Police vehicles, Lighting 322w
Priority routes, Leyton 16w
Racial attacks 148-9w
Racial attacks, Scotland 170w
Taxis, Licensing 101w
Treaties 353-4w
Unemployment, Leyton 348w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 456
Questions
Computer Misuse Act 1990, Convictions 237-8w
Jobclubs, White-collar workers 762-3
National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People, Public appointments 108-9w
Sea rescue, Contractorisation 136w
Spirits, Metrication 1077

Combined Heat & Power Association
244w

Commemorative coins
156w

Commencement orders
Planning & Compensation Bill (HL) 1990/91 278-9w

Commercial & Private Bank Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 147
2R order read (03:07:91) 299, (04:07:91) 421, (11:07:91) 1067

Commercial television
207w
Broadcasting licences 426-7
Franchising 427

Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals
University finance 110w

Committee stage
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:07:91) 620-1

Commonhold
Ministerial statements (12:07:91) 1237-46
Right to buy 414-5w

Community care
Elderly 117-8w
Elderslie Hospital 129w
Finance 457w
Health service staff 331w
Local government expenditure 342w
Scotland 342w

Community charge
245w, (12:07:91) 1289-96
Armed forces 377w
Councillors' disqualification (02:07:91) 182
Debt collection 377w
Liverpool 936
London boroughs 315-6w
Non-payment 181w, 936
Pensioners 413w
Tax collection 273-4w, 936-7
Tower Hamlets 315w
Waltham Forest 935-6

Community charge benefits
181w
Local government expenditure 394-6w

Community charge capping
942

Community Charge (Disqualification for Non-Payment) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (02:07:91) 182
2R order read (05:07:91) 620

Community charge exemptions
London boroughs 315-6w

Community charge reduction scheme
413w

Community Charges (Administration & Enforcement) Regulations 1989
Questions
179w

Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991
Questions
413w

Community relations
Northern Ireland 1075-7

Compact discs
Prices 300
Production 300

Companies
Billing 316
Crime 263w

Companies Act 1989
Questions
17w

Companies (Disclosure of Interests in Shares) (Orders imposing restrictions on shares) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(01:07:91) 42

Companies House Trading Fund Order 1991
Debates etc.
(04:07:91) 459

Companies (Subsidiaries in Liquidation) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (09:07:91) 781-3

Company accounts
Complaints 17w

Company investigations
CCL Assurance 522w
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales 160w

Company liquidations
International investments 375-6w
International Military Services 483w
Subsidiary companies (09:07:91) 781-3

Competition
Local government services 380-1w
Telecommunications industry 315

Complaints
Company accounts 17w
Low flying 133w
Trade unions 349w

Complaints against police
Compensation 4w, 68w
Scotland 68w

Comptroller & Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Computer applications
Criminal records 249-50w
Dept of Social Security local offices 458-60w

Computer Misuse Act 1990
Questions
Convictions 237-8w

Computer privacy
Television licences 321w

Computers
Members' facilities (08:07:91) 709-31

Concert halls
Manchester 220w

Concessionary television licences
422-3

Conditions of employment
763-4
American Airlines 140w

Confederation of British Industry
162w

Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe
see European Security Conference

Conferences
Environment protection 450w
Transport 2000 13w

Conflict of interests
Ministers (02:07:91) 184-6
Planning Inspectorate 415w

Congleton
Employment level 294w
Unemployment 294w

Congo
Diplomatic relations 300-1w

"Congressional Research Service on Non-Proliferation Regimes"
300w

Conservative Party
777
Northern Ireland government 477w

Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (04:07:91) 536

Consolidated Fund debates
Speaker's rulings & statements (11:07:91) 1101

Constitutional Reform Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (03:07:91) 340-2

Construction
British Library 90w
Overseas aid 368w
RNAD Coulport 156-7
Veterinary Investigation Service 74w

Construction costs
Chapel-en-le-Frith/Whaley Bridge bypass 421w

Construction materials
M40 175w

Consultants
NHS 333w

Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies
Auditing Practices Board 324w

Consumer protection
EC internal trade 18-9w
Electricity supply industry 37w

Contaminated land registers
Government grants to local authorities 90-1w

Continental shelf
Petroleum exploration licences 422w

Contractorisation
Sea rescue 136w

Contracts
Conwy tunnel 145w
Repairs & maintenance 429-30w
Youth training 294w

Contracts for services
Local government services 127w, 434-5, 939-40

Contracts of employment
764
Training 272w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Convictions
Computer Misuse Act 1990 237-8w

Conway, Mr Derek
Questions
EC Social Charter, Costs 761
Mergers, EC action 310

Conwy tunnel
146w
Contracts 145w

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 96-8
Questions
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 154
Economic recession 159w
"Gulf Between Us" 23w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Air pollution 211w
Military balance, Nuclear weapons policy 211w
Trawsfynydd power station, Radiation hazards 192-4w
Trawsfynydd power station, Water storage 193-4w
"Yearbook on Arms Control & Environmental Agreements (Verification Report)" 23-4w

Cook, Mr Robin
Questions
Ambulance services, Health service staff 120w
Blood transfusion services 120w

Cook, Mr Robin—continued
Blood transfusion services, Fees & charges 120w
Chronically sick, Hospital discharges 188w
Clinical Standards Advisory Group 186-7w
Fluoridation 335w
Fluoridation, District health authorities 335-6w
Fluoridation, Yorkshire Water 412w
Handicapped, Young people 453-4w
Medical education, Expenditure 187-8w
NHS, Building repairs 500-4w
NHS pensions, Retail price index 67w
NHS trusts, Manpower 188w
Occupational health, Nurses 154w, 329-30w
Occupational therapy 188w
Project 2000, Student grants 165w
Regional health authorities, Finance 336w
Tax collection 176w

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 458
Power industry (02:07:91) 229, 237-8
Questions
Community relations, Northern Ireland 1075-6
Council tax, Rate limitation 948-9
Young offenders, Parental responsibility 423

Coombs, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 710, 723-6
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 693-4
Questions
Army strength 135w
Census of population, Sleeping rough 334w
Commercial television 207w
Community charge capping 942
Compact discs, Production 300
EC Social Charter 767
Heart diseases, Wales 262w
M4, Road accidents 11w
Vale of Glamorgan railway 2

Coopers & Lybrand Associates
86w

Coordinating Committee on Export Controls
305

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 289-90
Trespass, Avon (02:07:91) 294

Coral
Environment protection 935
Persian Gulf 934-5

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (04:07:91) 429
Questions
Commercial television, Franchising 427

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Abolition of Deer Hunting Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 618
Elimination of Poverty in Retirement Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 619
Hare Coursing Bill, Rep adjourned (05:07:91) 614
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 345-6, 348
Ministerial statements, Points of order (02:07:91) 181
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 695-9, 705, 707
Questions
Business statements 1097
Nadin, Peter, Death 354-5w
West Indian immigrants 210w

Cornwall
Cost per pupil 126-7w
Cost per student 126-7w

Cornwall—continued
Railway freight transport 4
Regional aid 311

Cost per pupil
Cornwall 126-7w
Secondary education 262w
Wales 262w

Cost per student
Cornwall 126-7w

Couchman, Mr James
Questions
Defence review, Armed forces strength 156

Council house rents
Tower Hamlets 415w

Council house sales
379w
Scotland 514w
Wales 508-10w

Council housing
381w
Homelessness 941
Ministerial statements (10:07:91) 956-64

Council of Europe
UK delegations 110w

Council of Ministers
22-3w

Council tax
Mentally handicapped 182w
Non-domestic rates 949
Public opinion 947-8
Rate limitation 948-9
Tax burden 523w

Council tenants
Disabled facilities grants 275w

Councillors
Scotland 127w
Working hours 127w

Councillors' allowances
Scotland 127w

Councillors' disqualification
Community charge (02:07:91) 182

Countryside Council for Wales
447w

Countryside premium scheme
186w

Countryside stewardship scheme
182w, 946
Expenditure 946

Courts martial
Armed forces officers 215-6w
Douglas-Home, William 142w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Association of British Insurers, Codes of practice 429w
Audit, Professional organisations 521w
Birds, Import of live animals 371w
Centre for Applied Microbiology & Research 337w
Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies, Auditing Practices Board 324w
Ernst & Young, Dept of Trade inquiries 356w
Insurance, Investor protection 356w
Insurance Brokers' Registration Act 1977 356w
Leasing industrial equipment, Accounting 324w
NHS, Accounting 411-2w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Relocation of employees 411w
Pension funds, Accounting 324w
Plansworth Resettlement Unit 460w
Porton International, Research finance 458w
Social Fund, Social security benefits reductions 399w

Cousins, Mr Jim—continued
Social security benefits reductions, Newcastle upon Tyne 399w
Sound Diffusion, Dept of Trade inquiries 356w

Cox, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 616
Young Persons (Alcohol Abuse) Etc Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 616
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Kurdistan 134w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 216-7w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 285w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 195w

Craft industries
Wales 31-2w

Craigavon
1077-8

Cran, Mr James
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 734-7, 743, 745-6
Questions
Defence review, Armed forces strength 154-5
Humber Bridge Board, Debts 6
Planning Inspectorate, Recruitment 384-5w
Takeovers 158w

Crime
208w, 430
Companies 263w
Immigrants 220w

Crime prevention
Drug crimes 210w
Public participation 433

Crime prevention panels
West Midlands 433w
Young offenders 206w, 433w

Crime victims
Police 208w
Women 208-9w

Crimes of violence
Railway stations 422w
Women 152w

Criminal injuries compensation
510-1w

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
510-1w

Criminal investigation
International investments 375-6w

Criminal records
Computer applications 249-50w

Croatia
123w, 521w

Crofters' building grants & loans scheme
Scotland 237w

Cross border cooperation in Ireland
476w

Crown colonies
Expo 92 521w

Crown Prosecution Service
641-2

Crown prosecutors
Insolvency Service 256w

Crown Suppliers
951-2

Crowther, Mr Stan
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 474-6
Questions
Business statements 1092-3

Cryer, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 978
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 886-8
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 670
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Points of order (09:07:91) 779
Banks, Points of order (10:07:91) 965-6
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1107, 1112, 1145, 1162, 1164, 1169-73, 1180, 1187-9
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1192, 1197, 1200-1
Business motions, Points of order (08:07:91) 732, (09:07:91) 869
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 903-5, 906, 908, 913, 916
Housing estates (10:07:91) 962
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 858-9
Ministers of the Crown (Financial Interests) Bill, 1R (02:07:91) 184-6
Questions
Astra Training Services 202w
Bentley, Derek 215-6w
Business statements 446-7, 1092
Local government services, Contracts for services 939-40
Textile industry, Government assistance 316
3D, Shareholders 56w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 1079

Cullen Committee
see Piper Alpha Inquiry

Cultural heritage
Wallace, William 67w

Cunningham, Dr John
Debates etc.
Business questions interventions (11:07:91) 1094
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 709-15, 731
Questions
Boundary Commission for England, Parliamentary constituencies 106-7w
Boundary Commission for England, Public appointments 107w
Business statements 439-41, 1085-6

Curriculum
Educational finance 498w
Languages education 440w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc.
Business questions interventions (11:07:91) 1086
Bypasses (08:07:91) 740-4, 746, 753
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 898, 905-6
Housing (02:07:91) 193, 198-9
Questions
Business statements 446
Group of Seven, Industry 517w
Local government reform, Derbyshire 943
Television licences 427

Curry, Mr David, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture
Questions
Birds, Fishing gear 162w
Cereals 443w
Countryside premium scheme 186w
Dredging, Nature conservation 76w
Dredging, River Thames 76w
Drift nets, Dolphins 340w
EC Fisheries Council 341w
Environment protection, Exhibitions 441w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Agricultural land 373w
Fisheries, Norway 519w
Food, Balance of trade 21w
"Inventory of Radioactive Material Entering the Marine Environment" 250w

Curry, Mr David—continued
Opinion polls, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 441w
Publicity, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 75w, 373w, 443w
Set-aside schemes, Expenditure 441-2w
Set-aside schemes, Inspections 442w
Veterinary Investigation Service, Construction 74w
Whisky, Exports 373w

Customs & Excise
425w
Annual reports 298-9w
Day care of children 298w
Pay incentives 298w
Performance indicators 298w
Working hours 257w

Cycleways
Greater London 289w

Cycling
Road safety 5-6

Czechoslovakia
Overseas trade 21w
Plutonium 244w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Ancient Forests Bill, 1R (10:07:91) 968-70
Army (01:07:91) 57
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 673
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Points of order (09:07:91) 780
Bypasses (08:07:91) 737-8, 756
Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 122, 125-6, 128-9
European Council (01:07:91) 33
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 345, 371-2
Members' speeches, Points of order (01:07:91) 120
Ministers' domestic visits, Points of order (02:07:91) 181
Private notice question point of order (10:07:91) 955
Questions
Armed forces officers, Courts martial 215-6w
Barristers, Evidence 640-1
Caledonian Forest, Forest protection 344w
Caledonian Forest, Woodland grant scheme 344w
Drugs, Patents 98w
Industrial design 97w
Iraq, Health aid 260w
Iraq, Nuclear weapons 150
Kuwait, British residents abroad 124w
National Union of Mineworkers, Intelligence services 24w
Nuclear safety, Civil service manpower 348w
Parliamentary Works Office, Recruitment 337w
Persian Gulf, Environment protection 934-5
Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, Medical research 165-6w
Rain forests, Forest protection 326w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Finance 344w
Sites of special scientific interest, Scotland 344w, 475w
Trade marks, Law reform 98w
Wallace, Colin 478w

Dalzell
British Steel Corporation 375w

Daresbury
Nuclear physics 39-40w, 178w, 223-4w, 439w

Darling, Mr Alistair
Questions
Immigration applications, Legal advice & assistance 297w
Immigration applications, Primary purpose rule 425

Darling, Mr Alistair—continued
Information technology, Balance of trade 159w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service, Government grants 321-2w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service, Legal advice & assistance 322w

Dartmoor National Park
Armed forces training 144w

Data networks
Police national computer 102w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
Cardiff Bay 633-4
Grocery trade, Monopolies 177w
Health services, West Wales 261w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 30
Questions
Decca Navigator System 8-9

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 548-52, 556, 558-9, 563
Questions
Birds, EC law 313-4w
Birds, Import of live animals 372w
Cardiff Bay barrage 447w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Agricultural land 373w
Local government, Wales 639
Psittacosis 332w
Training & enterprise councils, Public appointments 447-8w

Davis, Mr Terry
Questions
Civil defence, Wyre Forest 249w
Defence land, Land acquisition 136w
Fringe benefits, Tax allowances 258w
Hospital waiting lists, East Birmingham Health Authority 54w
Income tax assessment 257-8w
Inner cities initiative, Birmingham 224w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Shipping safety 175w

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Domestic wastes, Recycling 96w

Day care of children
Civil service agencies 298w, 328w
Customs & Excise 298w
Dept of Social Security 328w
Fees & charges 473-4w
Scotland 473-4w

Day release
Hobbies 43w

Deaf
Children (11:07:91) 1207-14
Further education 630

Death
Alcoholism 471w
Domestic accidents 522w
Drinking & driving 139w
Nadin, Peter 354-5w
Road accidents 288-9w

Debt collection
Community charge 377w

Debts
Humber Bridge Board 6
London boroughs 274w
Severn bridge 309w
Student loans 43w

Decca Navigator System
8-9

Deer Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Defective housing
Swansea 630-1

Defence
Germany 135w
Labour Party 1080-1, 1083

Defence Arms Control Unit
242w

Defence contracts
Vickers Defence Systems 479w

Defence expenditure
Antitank missiles 212w
Armed forces strength 282w
Defence review 212w

Defence industries
147-8
Defence review 133w, 212w
Product development 325w
Redundancy 148-9, 518-9w
STRIDE programme 100w

Defence land
Land acquisition 136w, 487w
Planning permission 489w
Scotland 80w
Vacant land 134w
Wyre Forest 136w

Defence procurement
148
EH101 helicopters 147-8
Guided weapons 400w
Helicopters 479-80w
Nuclear submarines 213w
Sonar 491-2w
Tanks 479w

Defence Quality Assurance Directorate
Civil service dispersal 153-4

Defence Research Agency
77w

Defence review
(01:07:91) 43-119, 136w, 212-3w, 437-8, 483w, 490-1w, 495w, 1082
Air force 137-8w, 484w
Armed forces recruitment 155-6
Armed forces strength 154-6
Armed forces training 155
Civil service manpower 213w
Defence expenditure 212w
Defence industries 133w, 212w
NATO 212w
Navy 212w
Rapid deployment forces 150
Royal Irish Rangers 156
Trade associations 213w

Della Casa, Roseanna
23w

Dental Auxiliaries (Amendment) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Dental health
Health education 330w
Research finance 386w
Schools 385w
Wales 385-7w

Dental services
Anaesthetics 409w
Ministers' domestic visits 448w
Schools 312w, 385-6w
Surgery 387w
Wales 312w, 385-7w

Dental therapists
Dentures 188w

Dentists
HIV infection 388w

Dentists Act 1984 (Dental Auxiliaries) Amendment Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Dentures
Dental therapists 188w

Departmental circulars
Mental health community care 117w, 120w
Special education 404w

Departmental correspondence
Ministers 110w

Departmental publications
Dept of Social Security 122w
Waste management 55w

Departmental records
1w
Treasury 300w

Dept of Education & Science
Civil service manpower 402w
"Disability Manifesto" 153w
Opinion polls 438w
Publicity 43-4w, 405-6w, 438-9w

Dept of Employment
"Disability Manifesto" 154-5w
Opinion polls 464-5w
Publicity 72w, 390w, 465w

Dept of Energy
Opinion polls 424w
Publicity 39w, 423-4w

Dept of Health
"Disability Manifesto" 226-8w
Opinion polls 457w
Publicity 54w, 412w, 457w

Dept of Social Security
458-60w
Civil service manpower 327-8w
Day care of children 328w
Departmental publications 122w
"Disability Manifesto" 151w
Higher civil servants 460w
Opinion polls 461w
Publicity 66w, 459-61w
Working hours 327w

Dept of Social Security local offices
Computer applications 458-60w
Johnstone 197-200w

Dept of the Environment
"Disability Manifesto" 183w
Opinion polls 416w
Publicity 182w
Telephones 277w

Dept of Trade & Industry
"Disability Manifesto" 161w
Opinion polls 523w
Publicity 20w, 523w

Dept of Trade inquiries
Ernst & Young 356w
Sound Diffusion 356w

Dept of Transport
"Disability Manifesto" 140w
Members' correspondence 139-40w
Opinion polls 421w
Publicity 86w

Derbyshire
Dioxins 75w, 132w, 519w
Local government reform 943

Derbyshire County Council
943

Derelict land
Northumberland 937-8
Tyne & Wear 937-8

Derelict land grant
937-8

Developing countries
644-5
Government 645
Overseas aid 260w

Development areas
Regional aid 159w

Development Board for Rural Wales
Welsh Development Agency 31w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Quality Assurance Unit, Points of order (10:07:91) 964
Steel industry (04:07:91) 482, 484-5
Questions
All party groups, Government grants 300w
City technology colleges 401-2w
City technology colleges, Cleveland 401w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 153-4
Family Law & Administration Working Party 173w
Trade competitiveness 158w

Dewar, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 465-72, 493, 500
Questions
Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991 413w
Council tax, Tax burden 523w
Housing benefits, Local government expenditure 326-7w, 394-6w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 361-4w
Local government finance 314w
Rent rebates, Local government expenditure 395w
Standard spending assessments, Population 378w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Questions
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 955

Dicks, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 58
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 657
Questions
Opera houses 13

Dietary foods
Prescriptions 119-20w

Diocesan boards of education
(01:07:91) 131-3, 137-9

Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991
Debates etc.
(01:07:91) 131-3, 137-9

Dioxins
Derbyshire 75w, 132w, 519w
Incinerators 132w
Milk 73w, 75w, 132w, 339-40w, 519w
Pollution monitoring 73w
Pontypool 263-4w
Research 72w
Safety measures 131w

Diplomatic relations
Albania 123w
Congo 300-1w
Gabon 300-1w

Diplomatic service
Eastern Europe 164w

Director General of Electricity Supply
37w

Director of Public Prosecutions
297w

Directors
North West Water Group 945
Pay 159, 422-3w, 773, 1080

Disability living allowance
151w, 199-200w

Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board
199-200w

"Disability Manifesto"
Dept of Education & Science 153w
Dept of Employment 154-5w

"Disability Manifesto"—continued
Dept of Health 226-8w
Dept of Social Security 151w
Dept of the Environment 183w
Dept of Trade & Industry 161w
Dept of Transport 140w
Home Office 149w
Northern Ireland Office 301-4w
Prime Minister 184w
Treasury 156-7w
Welsh Office 449-50w

Disability working allowance
151w, 199-200w
Take-up 65w

Disabled facilities grants
275-6w
Council tenants 275w
Expenditure 276w

Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989
Questions
301-4w

Disabled Persons (Services Representation & Consultation) Act 1986
Questions
67w

Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee
(08:07:91) 675-708

Disabled workers
107w
Civil service 18-9
Employment discrimination 350w
Neath 772-3
Training 295w

Disaster relief
Africa 520w
Iraq 429w
Philippines 122w
Sudan 499w

Disclosure of information
Auditing Practices Board 18w
Budget 310w
CFE Treaty 520w
Lockerbie 238w
Medical records 280w
NHS trusts 332-3w
Office of Population Censuses & Surveys 334w
Personal records (08:07:91) 708
Police national computer 103-5w
Public records 9w
Regional development grants 344w
Training 345-6w

Disease control
Blue ear pig disease 74w, 340w, 444w

District councils
413w
Standard spending assessments 414w

District health authorities
Fluoridation 335-6w
Greater London 189w
Per capita costs 45-6w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 227-34, 239-40, 248, 258
Questions
Electricity supply industry, Pay 86w
Energy consumption, Northern Ireland Office 27-8w
Nuclear Electric, Pay 422-3w
Opinion polls, Attorney General 424w
Opinion polls, Dept of Education & Science 438w
Opinion polls, Dept of Employment 464-5w
Opinion polls, Dept of Energy 424w
Opinion polls, Dept of Health 457w
Opinion polls, Dept of Social Security 461w

Dobson, Mr Frank—continued
Opinion polls, Dept of the Environment 416w
Opinion polls, Dept of Trade & Industry 523w
Opinion polls, Dept of Transport 421w
Opinion polls, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 419w
Opinion polls, Home Office 435w
Opinion polls, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 441w
Opinion polls, Ministry of Defence 489w
Opinion polls, Scottish Office 473w
Opinion polls, Treasury 526w
Publicity, Dept of Education & Science 43-4w, 405-6w, 438-9w
Publicity, Dept of Employment 72w, 390w, 465w
Publicity, Dept of Energy 39w, 423-4w
Publicity, Dept of Health 54w, 412w, 457w
Publicity, Dept of Social Security 66w, 460-1w
Publicity, Dept of the Environment 182w
Publicity, Dept of Trade & Industry 20w, 523w
Publicity, Dept of Transport 86w
Publicity, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 24w, 419-20w
Publicity, Home Office 4w, 391-2w, 436w
Publicity, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 75w, 373w, 443w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 82w, 401w, 489-91w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 145w
Publicity, Scottish Office 131w, 515w
Publicity, Welsh Office 35-6w, 388w, 447w
Special care baby units 188-9w

Dock labour scheme
463-4w, 769
Leith 769-70

Dock workers
Surveys 463-4w

Dog wardens
380w

Dogs
207w
Injuries 98-9w
Tower Hamlets 390w

Dolphins
Drift nets 340w

Domestic accidents
Death 522

Domestic wastes
Recycling 96w

Doran, Mr Frank
Questions
Water pollution 379w

Dorrell, Mr Stephen, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Deafness, Diagnosis (11:07:91) 1210-4
Hospital admissions (05:07:91) 625-8
Questions
Abortion, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 52-3w
Alcoholism, Tower Hamlets 407w
Armed forces casualties, Aids for handicapped 81w
Blood transfusion services 120w
Blood transfusion services, Fees & charges 120w
Brook Hospital 117w, 165w
Census of population, Sleeping rough 334w
Centre for Applied Microbiology & Research 337w
Chemicals, Health hazards 336w
Childbirth 117w
Chronically sick, Hospital discharges 188w
Community care, Finance 457w
Dental health, Health education 330w
Dental services, Anaesthetics 409w

Dorrell, Mr Stephen—continued
Dental therapists, Dentures 188w
Disabled Persons (Services Representation & Consultation) Act 1986 67w
District health authorities, Greater London 189w
Elderly, Tower Hamlets 225w
Electorate, Tower Hamlets 224w
Epilepsy, Health services 411w
European Private Patients' Group 279w
Family doctors, Budgeting 164w
Family doctors, Tower Hamlets Health Authority 331w
Fluoridation 335w
Fluoridation, District health authorities 335-6w
Fluoridation, Yorkshire Water 412w
Food poisoning, Greater London 504-6w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 47-51w
Handicapped, Young people 453-4w
Health authorities, Trust funds 225w
Health service staff, Manpower 505w
Health service staff, Tower Hamlets 454-5w
Heart pacemakers 121w
Hepatitis, Vaccination 118w
Hip replacements 408w
Hospital closures 225w
Hospital closures, Tower Hamlets 407w
Hospital discharges 406w
Hospital discharges, Codes of practice 504w
Hospital patients 406w
Immigrant doctors, Mutual recognition of qualifications 119w
Incontinence, Health services 408w
Life expectancy 407w
Maternity services, Hospital beds 110-6w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 280w
Mental health community care, Departmental circulars 117w, 120w
Mental illness, Hospital beds 44-5w
Mentally handicapped, Finance 52w
Mentally handicapped, Handicapped children 51-2w
NHS, Accounting 411-2w
NHS, Building repairs 500-4w
NHS, Consultants 333w
NHS, Nottinghamshire 118w
NHS, Research finance 333-4w
NHS, Staffordshire 164-5w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Relocation of employees 411w
Occupational therapy 188w
Office of Population Censuses & Surveys, Disclosure of information 334w
Opinion polls, Dept of Health 457w
Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, Medical research 165-6w
Porton International, Research finance 458w
Prosthetics 407w
Psittacosis 332w
Psychiatric nurses, Somerset 331w
Publicity, Dept of Health 54w, 412w, 457w
School milk 330w
Senile dementia, Greater London 407w
Social security benefits, Mortgages 329w
Special care baby units 188-9w
Theft, Tower Hamlets Health Authority 455w
Voluntary organisations, Local government expenditure 417-9w
Warrington Health Authority, Per capita costs 45-6w
Wheelchairs 409w

Douglas, Mr Dick
Questions
Business statements 1097-8
Child care, Inquiries 237w
HMS Challenger, Decommissioning 283w
Low flying, Air accidents 79w
Shipping 140w
Warships 157-8

***Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James**, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Complaints against police, Compensation 68w
Council house sales, Scotland 514w
Fife Scottish Omnibuses, Privatisation 345w
Floods, Warnings 172w
Greenbelt, Scotland 170w
Ground water, Scotland 166w
Hazardous wastes, Scotland 468w
Homelessness, Scotland 167-8w
House condition survey, Scotland 346w
House condition survey, Sutherland 346w
Housing construction, Scotland 170w
Housing finance, Paisley 167w
Housing finance, Sutherland 346w
Irrigation, Licensing 166w
Judiciary, Public appointments 68w
Land ownership & tenure, Scotland 343w
Pedestrian crossings, Nairn 469w
Racial attacks, Scotland 170w
River pollution, Prosecutions 473w
River purification boards, Scotland 166-7w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Finance 344w
Sites of special scientific interest, Scotland 344w, 475w
Wallace, William, Cultural heritage 67w

Douglas-Home, William
Courts martial 142w

Dounreay
422w

Dover, Mr Den
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 209
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 272-3, 284
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 1073-4

Dredging
Environment protection 56-7w
Nature conservation 76w
River Thames 56-7w, 76w

Drift nets
Dolphins 340w

Drinking & driving
Death 139w

Driver information systems
385-6w

Driving instruction
Motorcycles 15w

"Driving Skills: The Motorcycling Manual"
15w

Drug abuse
Steroid drugs 310w

Drug crimes
Crime prevention 210w

Drug side effects
Duromine 410w

Drugs
357-8w
Labelling 316-7
Patents 19w, 45w, 98w
Prisoners 148w

Du Pont
26w
Hazardous wastes 25-6w, 141w, 231-4w

Duffy, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 51
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference 1079-80
Defence industries 148
Directors, Pay 1080
Young offenders 423

Dumping
Coal 86w

Dundee
168-70w

Dunnachie, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Naval bases, Rosyth dockyard 133w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Questions
Battered wives, Government grants to voluntary organisations 150w
Crime victims, Women 208-9w
Crimes of violence, Women 152w
Police, Crime victims 208w

Durant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 750
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 11

Duromine
Drug side effects 410w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1130, 1134, 1159-63
European Council (01:07:91) 28
Questions
Business statements 447

Eadie, Mr Alexander
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 162-3
Coal mining, Pay 244w

Early retirement
Teachers 243w

East Birmingham Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 54w

East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (04:07:91) 421, (11:07:91) 1067

East London river crossing
Environment protection 16w

East Midlands
Footwear industry 315-6
Textile industry 315-6

Eastern Europe
Diplomatic service 164w
Environment protection 516w
Overseas aid 516w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 110-2
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 656
Questions
Council tax, Non-domestic rates 949

EC action
Air transport 12w
Animal welfare 123w
Child care 506w
European Free Trade Association 254w
Frontiers 250w
Gibraltar 205w
Hydrocarbon oil duties (02:07:91) 290
Industrial democracy (09:07:91) 918-21
Mergers 310

EC Agriculture Council
22-3w

EC aid
259w

EC Budget Council
22-3w

EC Draft 4466/91
(09:07:91) 918-21

EC Draft 4822/91
(02:07:91) 290

EC Energy Council
423w

EC external relations
South Africa 24-5w
Yugoslavia 218-9w

EC Finance Council
22-3w, 367-8w

EC Fisheries Council
22-3w, 272w, 341w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
22-3w

EC grants & loans
Agriculture 131w
Coal mining 308
EC integration 308-9
Training 350w

EC immigration
European Council 183w

EC Industry Council
313

EC institutions
Civil servants' secondment 6w, 18

EC integration
EC grants & loans 308-9

EC Internal Market Council
22-3w

EC internal trade
Consumer protection 18-9w
Whisky 366w

EC Labour & Social Affairs Council
203-5w, 294w

EC law
Birds 313-4w
EC social policy 350w
Metrication 99w, 313-4
Slaughterhouses 131w
Water treatment 313-4w
Working hours 154w

EC Social Charter
348w, 761-2, 767-8
Costs 761
Unemployment 761
Women's employment 159

EC social policy
EC law 350w

EC transport policy
290w

Ecology
Research 450w

Economic & monetary union
161-2
Germany 311-2

Economic cooperation
263w

Economic growth
435, 773-4
Tax yields 525-6w

Economic models
Local government finance 523w

Economic recession
159, 159w, 160, 301-3, 1081-2
Northern region 302
Wales 637-8

Economic sanctions
Iraq 300w

Education Act 1944
Questions
402-3w

Education Act 1981
Questions
402-3w

Education Provision Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

Education (Pupil Attendance Records) Regulations 1991
Questions
440-1w

Education Reform Act 1988
Questions
440w

Education (Swimming & Water Safety) Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

Educational assessment
241-2w,
Braille 126w, 178w

Educational finance
Curriculum 498w
Local education authorities 497w
Trades Union Congress 68-9w

Educational institutions
Government contracts 405w

Educational policy
435

Educational standards
Languages education 440w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 813-6
Questions
Pontypool-Newport railway line, Investment 16w

***Eggar, Mr Tim**, Minister of State, Dept of Education & Science*
Questions
Blind, Handicapped students 178w
Braille, Educational assessment 126w, 178w
Braille, Handicapped students 153w
City technology colleges 401-2w
City technology colleges, Cleveland 401w
Crimes of violence, Women 152w
Curriculum, Educational finance 498w
Dept of Education & Science, Civil service manpower 402w
Educational assessment 241-2w
Educational institutions, Government contracts 405w
English education, Teacher training 224w, 404-5w, 437w
Examination boards, Ministerial powers 243w
Further education, Tower Hamlets 242w
Haberdashers' Aske's School, City technology colleges 438w
Local education authorities, Educational finance 497w
Nursery schools, London boroughs 241w
Opinion polls, Dept of Education & Science 438w
Publicity, Dept of Education & Science 43-4w, 405-6w, 438-9w
School year 241w
School year, General certificate of secondary education 241w, 243w
South Park School Lincoln 126w

Egypt
Exports 99w
Military attaches 136w
Unfair competition 254-5w

EH101 helicopters
Defence procurement 147-8

Elderly
Care assessment 117-8w
Community care 117-8w
Residential care 51w

Elderly—continued
Tower Hamlets 225w

Elderslie Hospital
Community care 129w

Election expenses
Parish councils 413w

Elections
Guyana 24w

Electoral register
(09:07:91) 777

Electorate
Tower Hamlets 224w

Electrical Contractors' Association
Training & enterprise councils 71-2w

Electrical Electronic Telecommunication & Plumbing Union
Minimum wage 349w

Electricity Act 1989
Questions
37w

Electricity generation
244w

Electricity supply industry
Consumer protection 37w
Opposition days (02:07:91) 227-69
Pay 86w
Privatisation 423w

Elimination of Poverty in Retirement Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Elmbridge Borough Council
Legal costs 245w

Emergency planning
Local authorities 247w
Local government functions 391-4w
London boroughs 320-1w
Nuclear powered vessels 241w

Emery, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 902
Questions
Defence review 1082
Lords amendments, House of Commons procedure 339w

Emigration
249w
USSR 215w

Employment Action
766, 1073-4
Older workers 766-7
Wales 34w

Employment discrimination
Disabled workers 350w
Northern Ireland 479w

Employment level
349w
Congleton 294w
Pay settlements 350w
Rugby 350w
Tower Hamlets 293w
Wales 312-3w

Employment of Children Act 1973 (Amendment) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Employment of Disabled People National Advisory Council
see National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People

Employment opportunities
352w
Cardiff Bay 633

Employment opportunities—continued
Foreign investment in UK 262w
Sheffield Development Corporation 221w
Wales 262w, 773

Employment protection
Airlines 140w
Pregnant women 294w

Employment Protection (Government Communications headquarters) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Employment schemes
767
Hackney 293w
Tower Hamlets 292w
Wales 263-4w

Employment Select Committee
107w, (03:07:91) 343-413

Employment Service
762-3

Employment training
68w, 272w, 292w, 465-6w
Refugees 463w
Scotland 473-4w
Skillcentres 70-1w
Special training needs 101w, 108w, 147w, 155w, 191w, 202w
Surveys 68w
Wales 101w, 147w, 191-2w

Employment (Upper Age Limits in Advertisements) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Empty housing
Armed forces married quarters 496w

Empty property
London boroughs 316-8w
Ministry of Defence 79w
Plymouth 79w

Energy Action Grants Agency
37-8w

Energy conservation
Motor vehicles 16w
Palace of Westminster 338-9w
Public transport 290w

Energy consumption
Northern Ireland Office 27-8w

Energy Select Committee
290w

Engineering education
Student numbers 264w

English education
Teacher training 224w, 404-5w, 437w

English National Opera
13
Arts finance 176w

Enterprise allowance scheme
New businesses 347w

Environment
International conferences 142w

Environment protection
Conferences 450w
Coral 935
Dredging 56-7w
East London river crossing 16w
Eastern Europe 516w
Exhibitions 441w
International conferences 450w
Non-departmental public bodies 453w
Overseas aid 427w
Persian Gulf 934-5

Environmental audit
Factories 284w
Northern Ireland 284w

Environmental education
243w

Environmental impact assessment
26w, 77w, 194w, 236w
Caravan sites 229w
M11 139w
Motorways 139w, 421w

Environmental policy
938, (12:07:91) 1215-36, 1247-86, 194
c1217-38, 1249-88
Expenditure 452w
Group of Seven 517w
Treasury 156w

Environmentally sensitive areas
Agricultural land 373w
Scotland 271-2w

Epilepsy
Health services 411w

Ernst & Young
Dept of Trade inquiries 356w

Established Church Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Estate Action
(10:07:91) 956-64
Hackney 314w

Estate management
500-4w

Estimates days
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 460-536
Iron & steel industry (04:07:91) 460-536
Refugees (03:07:91) 343-413
Unemployment (03:07:91) 343-413

Ethiopia
Food aid 498-9w

Ethnic minorities
Government grants to local authorities 1-3w

European Assembly
see European Parliament

European Coal & Steel Community
(04:07:91) 460-536

European Commission
16w

European Council
516w
EC immigration 183w
Ministerial statements (01:07:91) 21-41

European Court of Justice
389w

European Criminal Investigation Office
(01:07:91) 21-41

European currency unit
366-7w

European Environment Agency
515w

European Free Trade Association
471-2w
EC action 254w
Exports 305

European Investment Bank
367-8w

European Parliament
(01:07:91) 21-41

European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

European Private Patients' Group
279w

European Security Conference
238w

European Social Fund
350w

European Standing Committees
Training 338w

European Works Councils
(09:07:91) 918-21

Evans, Mr David
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 813
Questions
Nuclear weapons, USSR 134w
Police, Manpower 430
Trade unions, Complaints 349w

Evans, Mr John
Questions
Minimum wage 770

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
Naturalisation, Administrative delays 429

Evidence
Barristers 640-1
Inquiries 641

Ewing, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Companies (Subsidiaries in Liquidation) Bill, 1R (09:07:91) 783
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 334
Questions
Directors, Pay 159
EC Social Charter, Unemployment 761
Industry 308

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 49-50
European Council (01:07:91) 28
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 901, 915-6
Questions
EC aid 259w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 953
Radioactive waste disposal 950
Shipping safety 9
Whisky, EC internal trade 366w
Whisky, Exports 373w
Whisky, Tax yields 366w

Examination boards
153w, 241-3w
Ministerial powers 243w

Exchange rate mechanism
312

Exhibitions
Alternative energy 423-4w
Environment protection 441w

Explosives
Transport of hazardous materials 283w, 289w

Expo 92
Crown colonies 521w
Gibraltar 239w

Export Credits Guarantee Department
Privatisation 20-1w

Export licensing
Arms exports 430w

Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989
Questions
429w

Export of live animals
Horses (05:07:91) 546, (12:07:91) 1215

Exports
158w, 313
Egypt 99w
European Free Trade Association 305
Motor industry 302-3
Plutonium 244w
Whisky 373w

Exservicemen
Nuclear weapons tests 6w
War pensions 150-1w

Factories
Environmental audit 284w

Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991
Questions
House of Commons debates 479w

Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991
Questions
479w

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 472-4
Questions
Business statements 444

Falkland Islands
HMS Efidurance 151
Land ownership & tenure 300w

Fallon, Mr Michael, Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Education & Science
Questions
Assisted places scheme 125w
British Nuclear Fuels, School governors 438w
Cost per pupil, Cornwall 126-7w
Crimes of violence, Women 152w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Education & Science 153w
Environmental education 243w
Local education authorities, Judgments 404w
School administration 42-4w
School administration, Budgeting 436-7w
School buildings 223w
School year 304w
Schools, Manpower 42w
South Park School Lincoln 126w
Special education 403w
Special education, Appeals 402-3w
Special education, Departmental circulars 404w
Special education, Local education authorities 402w
Special education, Local government expenditure 304-8w
Special education, Schools & parents 403-4w
Student numbers, Tower Hamlets 242w
Teachers, Early retirement 243w
Teachers, London boroughs 243w
Teachers, Women 153w
Truancy 440-1w
Voluntary schools 439w
Voluntary schools, Barnet 303-4w
Voluntary schools, Capital investment 177w

False imprisonment
Compensation 4w, 101w

Family credit
Self-employed 196-7w
Social security benefits disqualification 397w
Social security benefits rules 398-9w
Take-up 66w
Tower Hamlets 326w

Family doctors
Budgeting 164w, 270w
Northumberland 164w
Scotland 270w
Tower Hamlets Health Authority 331w

Family Law & Administration Working Party
173w

"Farewell to the Third World"
260w

Farm & Conservation Grant Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 290

Farm & Conservation Grant (Variation) Scheme 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 290

Farm & conservation grants scheme
186w

Farm Diversification Grant (Variation) (No 2) Scheme 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 290

Farm Woodland (Variation) Scheme 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 290

Farms
North York Moors National Park 186w
Pollution control 340-1w

Farr, Sir John
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 739-40, 743-4
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 453
Questions
Attendance allowance, Fylde 398w
Labour Party, Defence 1080-1
Motorcycles, Driving instruction 15w

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Questions
South Park School Lincoln 126w
South Park School Lincoln, Planning permission 94w
Youth training, Training & enterprise councils 765-6

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 174

Favell, Mr Tony
Questions
Business statements 1094
Economic & monetary union 162
Exchange rate mechanism 312

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 207-11
Housing estates (10:07:91) 960
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 679, 682, 685, 687, 693, 705
Questions
Newhaven-Dieppe ferry, Industrial disputes 291w
Road accidents, Children 5

Federation of Catering Equipment Suppliers
18w

Ferries
85w
Rathlin Island 26-7w
Shipping accidents 85w
Shipping safety 84-6w

Field, Mr Barry
Questions
Orchestras, Arts finance 88w
Road signs 16w
Truancy 163-4

Field, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 798-803
Questions
Brewing industry, Public houses 19w

Fields, Terry
(12:07:91) 1289-96

Fife
Child care 237w

Fife Scottish Omnibuses
Privatisation 345w

Finance Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Business motion (12:07:91) 1286

Financial loss allowance
127w

Financial Reporting Review Panel
17w

Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 575
European Council (01:07:91) 29
Questions
Council of Europe, UK delegations 110w

Fire alarms
Houses (05:07:91) 594-611

Fire engines
208w, 430-4w

Fire regulations
Building Regulations Advisory Committee 147-8w

Fire services
Greater London 430-4w
Greenford 208w
Northolt 208w

Fire stations
430-4w

Firearms certificates
207w, 247w

Firing ranges
Licensing 135w

Fish
Pesticides 515w

Fish conservation
Scotland 374-5w

Fish farming
Salmon 272w
Scotland 272w

Fishburn, Mr Dudley
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1240

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
English National Opera 13

Fisheries
Norway 471-2w, 519w

Fishing crews
Housing finance 237w

Fishing gear
Birds 162w

Flags
Newtownards 497w
Whitehall 316w

Flannery, Mr Martin
Questions
Homelessness 943

Floods
Scotland 172w
Warnings 172w

Flowers
House of Commons 211w

Fluoridation
335w
District health authorities 335-6w
Wales 386-7w
Yorkshire Water 412w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 882-4
European Council (01:07:91) 32-3
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 280-1
Questions
ACP countries, Health education 428w
Alternative energy, Exhibitions 423-4w
Arab Industrial Organisation, Military attaches 136w
Armed forces deployment 78-80w
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 78w

Flynn, Mr Paul—continued
Arms control 300w, 516w
Arms control negotiations 643-4
Arms exports, Export licensing 430w
Arms trade, Iraq 241w
British Nuclear Fuels, School governors 438w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 417w, 452w
Chemicals, Health hazards 336w
China, Greenhouse effect 450w
Civil service, Job satisfaction 5w
Civil service manpower, Gwent 426-7w
Defence industries, Product development 325w
Defence land, Scotland 80w
Dioxins, Pontypool 263-4w
Drift nets, Dolphins 340w
Eastern Europe, Overseas aid 516w
Employment Action, Wales 34w
Employment schemes, Wales 263-4w
Environment, International conferences 142w
Environment protection, Conferences 450w
Environment protection, Exhibitions 441w
Environment protection, International conferences 450w
Environment protection, Non-departmental public bodies 453w
Environmental education 243w
Environmental policy, Expenditure 452w
Exports, Egypt 99w
Group of Seven, Environmental policy 517w
Industrial wastes, Polychlorinated biphenyl 56w
Inland waterways, Water pollution 95w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 245w
"Inventory of Radioactive Material Entering the Marine Environment" 250w
Iraq, Economic sanctions 300w
Iraq, Nuclear weapons 252w
Iraq, Refugees 420w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Chemical weapons 342w
Kurdistan, Armed forces deployment 253w
Low flying, Air accidents 80w
"Low Level Waste Disposal" 276w
Malawi, Human rights 428w
"Markets for Environmental Monitoring Instrumentation" 325w
Ministerial policy advisors, Poland 416w
Museums & galleries, Fees & charges 5w
Natural Environment Research Council, UK contributions 450w
Nuclear Electric, Advertising 422w
Nuclear safeguards 244w
Overseas aid, Environment protection 427w
Overseas trade, Czechoslovakia 21w
Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology 281w
Parliamentary questions 253w
Pentachlorophenol, Pollution monitoring 57-8w
Planning appeals, Wales 34-6w
Plutonium, Exports 244w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, Rights of accused 248w
Product safety 316-7
Radioactive wastes, Nuclear safeguards 422w
Rain forests, Forest protection 452w
Road traffic control, Road accidents 309-10w
Royal Welch Fusiliers 34w
Shipping accidents, Transport of radioactive materials 291w
Simplification of International Trade Procedures Board 21w
Strategic programme for innovation & technology transfer 100w
STRIDE programme, Defence industries 100w
Telephone services, Compensation 19w
Telephones, Dept of the Environment 277w
Telephones, Home Office 248w
Telephones, Ministry of Defence 283w

Flynn, Mr Paul—continued
Telephones, Northern Ireland Office 500w
Telephones, Scottish Office 271w
Telephones, Treasury 257-8w
Telephones, Welsh Office 264w
Transport of radioactive materials, Uranium 15w
UN Environment Programme 416w
Unemployment, Wales 32-3w
United Nations, Alternative energy 450w
USA, Foreign policy 219w
Venezuela, Official visits 414w
Water pollution 383w
Water treatment, Nuclear reactors 525w
World Bank, Annual reports 428w
World Conservation Monitoring Centre 450-1w

Food
Balance of trade 21w

Food aid
Ethiopia 498-9w
Mozambique 499w

Food aid from UK
Africa 499w

Food contamination
Meat 443w

Food industry
Manpower 202-4w

Food labelling
Irradiated food 341w

Food poisoning
Greater London 504-6w

Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No 4) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(10:07:91) 965

Food Safety Act 1990
Questions
443w

Fookes, Dame Janet
Questions
Animal welfare, EC action 123w
Warships 158

Football pools
Foundation for Sport & the Arts 527-8w

Football Spectators Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 620

Footwear industry
East Midlands 315-6
Redundancy 109w

Foreign Affairs Select Committee
(03:07:91) 343-413

Foreign aid
EC countries 259w

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
238w
Opinion polls 419w
Publicity 24w, 419-20w

Foreign companies in UK
299

Foreign Corporations Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1288

Foreign investment in UK
311
Employment opportunities 262w
Germany 311
Industrial research 301
Japan 158-9w, 301
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 309
USA 301
Wales 639-40

Foreign policy
USA 219w

Foreign trade
EC countries 96w
Luxembourg 96w
Portugal 96w

Forensic Science Service
390w

Forest protection
(10:07:91) 968-70
Caledonian forest 344w
International cooperation 326w
Overseas aid 452w
Rain forests 326w, 452w

Forestry Commission Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 27
Questions
Capital movements 87w
Metrication, EC law 313-4

Forsyth, Mr Michael, Minister of State for Scotland
Debates etc.
Stobhill Hospital (09:07:91) 926-30
Questions
Abortion, Scotland 130w
AIDS, Scotland 346w
AIDS in Scotland Task Force 271w
Alcoholism, Death 471w
Birds, Pest control 466-8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 195w
Caledonian Forest, Forest protection 344w
Caledonian Forest, Woodland grant scheme 344w
Child care, Inquiries 237w
Clinical wastes, Infectious diseases 470w
Clinical wastes, Scotland 374w, 469-70w
Clinics, Johnstone 128w
Community care, Local government expenditure 342w
Day care of children, Fees & charges 473-4w
Elderslie Hospital, Community care 129w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Scotland 271-2w
Family doctors, Budgeting 270w
Fish conservation, Scotland 374-5w
Fisheries, Norway 471-2w
"Future of the Careers Service (Scotland) Consultation Paper" 347w
Health visitors, Greater Glasgow Health Board 469w
HIV infection, Pregnant women 129-30w
Hospital closures, Scotland 236-7w
Mental illness specific grant, Scotland 235-6w, 342w
NHS administration, Manpower 374w
NHS administration, Scotland 270w
NHS finance, Scotland 195-6w
Play groups, Fees & charges 475w
Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley, Security 128w
Salmon, Fish farming 272w
Schools, Local government expenditure 236w
Senile dementia, Scotland 470-2w
Set-aside schemes, Scotland 474-5w
Set-aside schemes, Take-up 475w
Sixth form education, Inverclyde 472w
Vocational guidance, Scotland 343w, 374w
Wild geese, Pest control 342-3w

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 997, 1022-7
Questions
Sports, Northern Ireland 1075

Forth, Mr Eric, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Questions
Conditions of employment 763-4
Contracts of employment 764

Forth, Mr Eric—continued
Dock labour scheme 769
Dock labour scheme, Leith 769-70
Dock workers, Surveys 463-4w
Health & Safety Executive, Transport of hazardous materials 293w
Local enterprise agencies 154w
New businesses, Enterprise allowance scheme 347w
Nuclear safety, Civil service manpower 348w
Occupational health, Nurses 154w
Pregnant women, Employment protection 294w
Small businesses, Government assistance 216w
Small Firms Service 348w
Trade union officials, Training 201w
Trade unions, Complaints 349w
Trades Union Congress, Educational finance 68-9w
Training, EC grants & loans 350w
Working hours, EC law 154w

Forth Ports Authority (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Forth Valley
Local enterprise companies 513-4w

Forum of Private Business
303-4

Fossil fuel levy
39w

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 378
Textile industry, Kilmarnock (03:07:91) 416, 418
Questions
Employment Action 766
Funerals, Codes of practice 307
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 248w
Unemployment, Men 389w

Foundation for Sport & the Arts
Football pools 527-8w

France
Air traffic control 11w
Armed forces training 400w
Government assistance to nationalised industries 314

Franchising
Commercial television 427

Franks, Mr Cecil
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 747-50, 754

Fraser, Mr John
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1241
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 658
Questions
Brewing industry, Public houses 311w
Bus services, Greater London 10w
Friendly societies, Legislation 430w
Inquiries, Evidence 641
Legal Aid Board, Repossession orders 497w
Opera houses, Greater London 12-3
Refugees, Legal aid 433-4w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service, Legal advice & assistance 322w

Fraud
Audit 430w

Freeman, Mr Roger, Minister for Public Transport
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1122, 1181-90
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1202-5

Freeman, Mr Roger—continued
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 841, 844-6, 853, 855
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 274-6, 285-8
Questions
British Rail 10w
British Rail, Privatisation 11w, 12
Bus services, Greater London 10w
Bus services, Handicapped 290w
Buses, Greater London 15w
Channel tunnel, Greater Manchester 4-5
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 9-10, 10w, 11
Channel tunnel, Railway network 10w, 11, 236w
Circle line, Investment 420w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Transport 140w
Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line, Investment 11w
London Underground, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 15w
Railway electrification, Investment 10w
Railway freight transport 289w
Railway stations, Crimes of violence 422w
Railway stations, Railway workers 421-2w
Transport, Safety measures 84w

French, Mr Douglas
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 205-7
Questions
Banks, Small businesses 299w
Housing construction, Warranties 522w
Local education authorities, Educational finance 497w
Office equipment, Repairs & maintenance 429-30w
Road accidents, Pedestrians 5
Share shops 450w
Uniform business rate, Sports facilities 524w
VAT, Tax collection 526w

Fresh start
514w
Brixton Prison 513w

Friendly societies
Legislation 430w

Frigates
Shipbuilding 214w

Fringe benefits
Tax allowances 258w

Frontiers
EC action 250w

Fry, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 273-4
Questions
Bingo, Advertising controls 321w
RAF Northolt, Air transport 84w

Funerals
306-7
Codes of practice 307

Furans
263-4w

Further education
Deaf 630
Tower Hamlets 242w
Wales 630

"Further Education in Northern Ireland: The Road Ahead"
234w

"Future of the Careers Service (Scotland) Consultation Paper"
347w

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 354, 369-70
Low incomes (09:07:91) 805-6, 811, 823
Steel industry (04:07:91) 487

Fyfe, Mrs Maria—continued
Questions
Low pay 348w
Refugees, Iraq 206w

Fylde
Attendance allowance 398w

Gabon
Diplomatic relations 300-1w

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Questions
Family doctors, Budgeting 270w
Health visitors, Greater Glasgow Health Board 469w
NHS administration, Scotland 270w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 701, 705
Questions
Birds, Import of live animals 162w, 217w
Braille, Educational assessment 178w

Gaming (Bingo) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Gaming Board for Great Britain
321w

Garden Supplies (Sunday Trading) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Garel-Jones, Mr Tristan, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Questions
Animal welfare, EC action 123w
Antarctic, HMS Endurance 354w
Council of Ministers 22-3w
Expo 92, Crown colonies 521w
Gibraltar, EC action 205w
Gibraltar, Expo 92 239w
Market information enquiry service, Administrative costs 253-4w

Garrett, Mr John
Questions
Disability working allowance, Take-up 65w
Family credit, Take-up 66w
Invalid care allowances, Take-up 65w
Social security payments 121w
Widows' benefits, Take-up 65w

Garrett, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 68, 72, 89, 92-4
Questions
Derelict land, Northumberland 937-8
Firearms certificates 207w
Industrial production 157w
Territorial Army, Armed forces recruitment 133w

Gas supply industry
Opposition days (02:07:91) 227-69

GATT
219w

General certificate of secondary education
Braille 101w
School year 241w, 243w

General Motors
301

Genetically Modified Organisms (Northern Ireland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 879-81, 892-3
Army (01:07:91) 101-3
Questions
Armed forces training, France 400w

George, Mr Bruce—continued
Royal ordnance factories, Ministry of Defence police 143w

Germany
Defence 135w
Economic & monetary union 311-2
Foreign investment in UK 311

Gibraltar
Air routes 292w
Air traffic control 84w
EC action 205w
Expo 92 239w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 504, 527
Questions
Bypasses 287-8w
HMS Endurance, Falkland Islands 151
NHS trusts, Northern Ireland 477w
Set-aside schemes 442w

Glamorgan
Civil service manpower 426-7w

Glasgow
168-70w, 462-4w

Glenanne
1071-2

Glyn, Sir Alan
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 59, 61
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 349
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Kurdistan 153

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 973, 979, 990
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 576, 581, 585-6, 590
European Council (01:07:91) 35
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 845, 847, 849
Steel industry (04:07:91) 473
Questions
Alcoholism, Death 471w
Armagh Four 476w
Complaints against police, Compensation 68w
Employment training, Scotland 473-4w
Judiciary, Public appointments 68w
MFV Antares, Shipping accidents 8
RENAVAL, Inverclyde 473w
River pollution, Prosecutions 473w
RNAD Coulport, Construction 156-7
Senile dementia, Scotland 470-2w
Sixth form education, Inverclyde 472w
Unemployment, Greenock 472w
Unemployment, Scotland 129w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 256

Goodhart, Sir Philip
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 82-3
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1106, 1188
Political refugees (02:07:91) 172

Goods vehicles
Axle weights 174-5w
Safety belts 308-9w

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 94-6
Questions
Defence review, Civil service manpower 213w
Flags, Whitehall 316w
Iraq, Chemical weapons 124-5w

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 212-3
Questions
Alcoholism, Tower Hamlets 407w

Gordon, Ms Mildred—continued
Community charge, London boroughs 315-6w
Community charge, Tower Hamlets 315w
Dogs, Tower Hamlets 390w
Elderly, Tower Hamlets 225w
Electorate, Tower Hamlets 224w
Emergency planning, London boroughs 320-1w
Employment level, Tower Hamlets 293w
Employment schemes, Tower Hamlets 292w
Empty property, London boroughs 316-8w
Family doctors, Tower Hamlets Health Authority 331w
Fire services, Greater London 430-4w
Firearms certificates 247w
Food poisoning, Greater London 504-6w
Further education, Tower Hamlets 242w
Government grants to local authorities 377-8w
Health service staff, Tower Hamlets 454-5w
Homelessness, London boroughs 317w
Hospital closures, Tower Hamlets 407w
Housing construction, Tower Hamlets 92-4w
Income support, Tower Hamlets 326w
Life expectancy 407w
London boroughs, Debts 274w
Nursery schools, London boroughs 241w
Old people's homes, Tower Hamlets 330w
Rate arrears 315w
Rate arrears, Tower Hamlets 383w
River Lea, River pollution 382w
Senile dementia, Greater London 407w
Student numbers, Tower Hamlets 242w
Teachers, London boroughs 243w
Theft, Tower Hamlets Health Authority 455w
Unemployed, Per capita costs 363-4w
Unemployment, Tower Hamlets 349w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Housing estates (10:07:91) 963
Questions
Basildon Link 181w
Business statements 449
Childbirth, Costs 279-80w
European Private Patients' Group 279w
Greater London 179w
HIV infection 165w
Immigration 206w
Languages education, Greater London 160w
Local government audit, Local government politics 380w
Menopause, Surveys 117w
Minimum wage, USA 770
Ministers, Greater London 272w

Gorst, Mr John
Debates etc.
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 332

Gould, Mr Bryan
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1221
Housing (02:07:91) 187-94
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Local authorities 948
Community charge, Tax collection 936-7

Government
Developing countries 645

Government assistance to nationalised industries
France 314

Government contracts
Advertising agencies 87-8w, 358w, 364-5w
Educational institutions 405w

Government departments
Billing 245w, 299w

Government grants to local authorities
55-6w, 377-8w
Contaminated land registers 90-1w

Government grants to local authorities—continued
Ethnic minorities 1-3w
Mentally handicapped 95w
Scotland 168-70w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
47-51w
Battered wives 150w

Government research establishments
Agricultural & Food Research Council 178-9w

Grant, Sir Anthony
Questions
Business statements 1095
Road traffic offences, Statistics 287w
Safety belts, Goods vehicles 308-9w
Speed governors, Lorries 287w

Grant, Mr Bernie
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 31
Political refugees (02:07:91) 171
Questions
Frontiers, EC action 250w
Identity cards 218w
Immigrants, Crime 220w
Immigration, Intergovernmental conference 220w
Police, EC countries 219w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service 216w

Greater Glasgow Health Board
(09:07:91) 924-30
Health visitors 469w

Greater London
179w
Arts finance 4-5w
Bus services 10w
Buses 15w
Cycleways 289w
District health authorities 189w
Fire services 430-4w
Food poisoning 504-6w
Languages education 160w
Ministers 272w
Music 14
Opera houses 12-3
Senile dementia 407w
Uniform business rate 179w

Greater London Association for Disabled People
290w

Greater Manchester
Channel tunnel 4-5
Olympic Games (04:07:91) 537-44

Greece
British residents abroad 354-5w

Greenbelt
Scotland 170w

Greenford
Fire services 208w

Greenhouse effect
379-80w
China 450w

Greenock
129w
Unemployment 472w

Greenpeace
340w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Horses, Public petitions (05:07:91) 546
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 551
Questions
Arts finance, Greater London 5w
Buses, Greater London 15w
Business statements 1089-90
Circle line, Investment 420w

Greenway, Mr Harry—continued
Employment opportunities 352w
Fire services, Northolt 208w
Local enterprise agencies 154w
Official engagements 110w, 183w, 453w
Planning permission, Fees & charges 277w
Rents to mortgages scheme 378w
South Africa, Overseas aid 646-7
Sports, VAT 1074-5
"Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1991" 136w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 39
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 899
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 655
Questions
Commercial television, Franchising 427
Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, House of Commons debates 479w

Greenwich
Standard spending assessments 272w

Gregory, Mr Conal
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1113, 1115, 1132-3, 1135, 1139-47, 1173-4, 1177, 1179-80
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1196, 1203
Housing (02:07:91) 187, 217
Questions
Business statements 447
Cycling, Road safety 5-6
Hospital closures 225w
Hospital closures, Northern Ireland 376w
Hospital closures, Scotland 236-7w
Hospital closures, Wales 230w
Insolvency Service, Crown prosecutors 256w
Insolvency Service, Prosecutions 255w
Insolvency Service, Yorkshire & Humberside 18w, 255-6w

Gresford
Gypsies 229w

Greyhound Betting Levy Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 620

Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Questions
Boxer system, Costs 400w
Boxer system, Planning authorities 400-1w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Air targeting systems 239-40w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, ALARM missiles 240w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1221, 1265, 1283-7
European Council (01:07:91) 30
Questions
Confederation of British Industry 162w
Directors, Pay 773
Employment level, Wales 312-3w
North West Water Group, Pollution control 945
Special education, Wales 630
Standard assessment tasks, Wales 33-4w
Town & Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 320w

Grist, Mr Ian
Questions
Severn bridge, Accidents 140-1w
Tourism, Wales 629
Welsh Assembly 638-9

Grocery trade
Monopolies 177w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 898-902
Property Services Agency, Points of order (10:07:91) 965
Questions
Commercial television, Broadcasting licences 426-7

Ground, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 666
Low incomes (09:07:91) 821-2

Ground water
Scotland 166w

Group of Seven
Environmental policy 517w
Industry 517w

Grylls, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 58-9
Power industry (02:07:91) 240-1
Questions
European currency unit 366-7w

Guided weapons
Defence procurement 400w

"Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England & Wales"
58w

Guildford Four Inquiry
209w

"Gulf Between Us"
23w

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
Agricultural Development & Advisory Service, Fees & charges 184w
Agriculture, EC grants & loans 131w
Agriculture, Voluntary organisations 444w
Blue ear pig disease 163w
Blue ear pig disease, Disease control 74w, 340w, 444w
Blue ear pig disease, Lincoln 73w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 250-2w
Dioxins, Incinerators 132w
Dioxins, Milk 75w, 132w, 339w
Farms, Pollution control 340-1w
Irradiated food, Food labelling 341w
Meat, Food contamination 443w
North York Moors National Park, Farms 186w
Pesticides, Licensing 252w
Set-aside schemes 442w
Set-aside schemes, Agricultural research 520w
Veterinary Investigation Service 183-6w
Veterinary Investigation Service, Salmonella 74w

Gurkhas
490w

Guyana
Elections 24w

Gwent
Civil service manpower 426-7w

Gypsies
Gresford 229w

Haberdashers' Aske's School
City technology colleges 438w

Hackney
Employment schemes 293w
Estate Action 314w
Inner cities initiative 323w
Inner city partnerships 274-5w

Hague, Mr William
Questions
Defence review, Armed forces recruitment 156

Hain, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 671
Questions
Business statements 1099-100
Disabled workers, Neath 772-3
Post Office 161w
Telecommunications industry, Market Share 314-5
Unemployment, Wales 261w

Halons
211w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie, Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 43-59, 115-9
Members' speeches, Points of order (01:07:91) 120
Questions
Air force 492-6w
Air force bases 480-2w
Air force bases, US bases 134-5w
Armed forces 490-1w
Armed forces, Capital punishment 399-400w
Armed forces, Racial harassment 132-3w, 485w
Armed forces casualties 158-9
Armed forces casualties, Armed forces training 81w, 518w
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 400w
Armed forces casualties, Inquiries 239w
Armed forces deployment 78-80w
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 78w
Armed forces discharges, Training 484w, 488w
Armed forces discharges, Vocational guidance 484w
Armed forces married quarters, Empty housing 496w
Armed forces officers, Courts martial 215-6w
Armed forces recruitment 342w
Armed forces recruitment, Scotland 133w
Armed forces strength 490-1w
Armed forces strength, Defence expenditure 282w
Armed forces training, Accident insurance 240w
Armed forces training, Armed forces casualties 76w
Armed forces training, Dartmoor National Park 144w
Armed forces training, France 400w
Army 135w, 485-7w, 490-1w
Army, Armed forces recruitment 212w, 240w, 485w
Army Act 1955, Inquiries 76w
Army in Northern Ireland, Armed forces strength 239w
Army strength 135w
Asbestos, Ministry of Defence 77w
Bomb disposal, Technical assistance 142-3w
CFE Treaty, Arms control 483w
Chipmunk aircraft, Operating costs 517w
Defence, Germany 135w
Defence Arms Control Unit 242w
Defence land, Land acquisition 136w, 487w
Defence land, Planning permission 489w
Defence land, Vacant land 134w
Defence review 212-3w
Defence review, Air force 137-8w, 484w
Defence review, Navy 212w
Douglas-Home, William, Courts martial 142w
Explosives, Transport of hazardous materials 283w
Firing ranges, Licensing 135w
Guided weapons, Defence procurement 400w
Hicks, Adrian, Armed forces pensions 81w, 282w
HMS Endurance, Falkland Islands 151
HMS Endurance, Shipbuilding 282w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Air force 135w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie—continued
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Air pollution 211w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Armed forces casualties 484w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Chemical weapons 342w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Mental illness 143-4w
Low flying, Air accidents 79w
Military aid to civil community, Helicopters 134w
Military balance, Nuclear weapons policy 211w
Ministry of Defence, Empty property 79w
Ministry of Defence, Higher civil servants 482w, 518w
Naval bases 134w
Naval bases, Rosyth dockyard 133w
Nuclear powered vessels, Emergency planning 241w
Nuclear powered vessels, International cooperation 241w
Nuclear submarines 518w
Nuclear weapons, Nuclear safeguards 487w
Nuclear weapons, USSR 134w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 82w, 401w, 489-91w
RAF Hullavington 489w
Red Arrows, Whitby 400w
RNAD Coulport, Construction 156-7
Sea rescue, Contractorisation 136w
Shipbuilding, USSR 213w
Tanks, Repairs & maintenance 281w
Warships, South Atlantic 282w

Hamilton, Mr Neil, An Assistant whip
Debates etc.
Stobhill Hospital (09:07:91) 926

Hampson, Dr Keith
Questions
Drugs, Patents 19w
Eastern Europe, Diplomatic service 164w
Planning permission 414w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 414w

Handicap benefits
Orders & regulations 199-200w
Right of abode 66w

Handicapped
Bus services 290w
Hospital discharges 188w
Young people 453-4w

Handicapped children
Mentally handicapped 51-2w

Handicapped students
Blind 178w
Braille 153w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy, Under-Secretary of State Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 285w
Heart diseases, Hospital waiting lists 285w
Heart diseases, Northern Ireland 284w
Hospital closures, Northern Ireland 376w
Islands, Northern Ireland 125w
Kidney machines, Northern Ireland 1077-8
NHS trusts, Northern Ireland 477w
Northern Ireland health & social services boards, Finance 479w
Retirement pensions, Northern Ireland 125w
Rural areas, Northern Ireland 231w
Transplant surgery, Northern Ireland 1078

Hannam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 243-5
Questions
Armed forces training, Dartmoor National Park 144w
Iraq, Nuclear weapons 775
Squatting, Shops 428

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 572-5
Power industry (02:07:91) 237, 254-6

Hardy, Mr Peter—continued
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 550, 554-5
Questions
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Air force 135w
Local government reform 943
Road traffic 11w

Hare Coursing Bill
Debates etc.
Rep adjourned (05:07:91) 612-5

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 233

Harman, Ms Harriet
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 515-21
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 907, 913-4
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 10w
Dept of Social Security, Departmental publications 122w
Health authorities, Trust funds 225w

Harris, Mr David
Questions
Railway freight transport, Cornwall 4
Youth training, St Ives 765

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 33

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 167-9
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 650-2, 659
Questions
Economic recession 1081-2

Hawkins, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 240

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 512-5, 520-1
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 656

Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Questions
Electricity supply industry, Consumer protection 37w

Haynes, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 123-4
Low incomes (09:07:91) 801
Questions
Police 432-3

Hayward, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Trespass, Avon (02:07:91) 294-5
Questions
Air transport, EC action 12w
Public expenditure 162

Hazardous wastes
Chemical industries 234w
Du Pont 25-6w, 141w, 231-4w
EC countries 92w
Imports 141w, 444w
Incinerators 413w
Ireland 141w
Northern Ireland 26w, 234w
Scotland 468w
Wales 444w

Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 804-5

Health aid
Iraq 260w

Health & Safety at Work (Tobacco Smoking) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Health & Safety Executive
348w, 420-1w
Transport of hazardous materials 293w

Health authorities
Trust funds 225w

Health Care Corporation
Legal costs 245w

Health Care of Prisoners Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Health education
225-6w
ACP countries 428w
Dental health 330w

Health hazards
Chemicals 336w
Sheep dipping 73w, 519w

Health Select Committee
118w, (04:07:91) 460-536

Health Service Commissioner
Annual reports 334w

Health service staff
Ambulance services 120w
Community care 331w
Manpower 329w, 505w
Tower Hamlets 454-5w

Health services
Epilepsy 411w
Incontinence 408w
Nursing homes 263w
Wales 261w
West Wales 261w

Health Services & Public Health Act 1968
Questions
47-51w

Health visitors
225-6w
Greater Glasgow Health Board 469w

Heart diseases
Hospital waiting lists 285w
Northern Ireland 284-5w
Wales 262w

Heart pacemakers
121w

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Energy
Questions
Coal, Dumping 86w
Coal mining, Pay 244w
Electricity generation 244w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 423w
Fossil fuel levy 39w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Administrative delays 37-8w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Finance 38w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 245w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 38w
Non-fossil fuel obligation, Finance 38w
Non-fossil fuel obligation, Nuclear power 37w
Nuclear Electric, Advertising 422w
Nuclear safeguards 244w
Plutonium, Exports 244w
Radioactive wastes, Nuclear safeguards 422w
Sizewell B, Nuclear levy 38w

Helicopters
Defence procurement 479-80w
Military aid to civil community 134w

Hemingway, Barry
158-9

Henderson, Mr Doug
Questions
Car industry, West Midlands 306

Hepatitis
Vaccination 118w

Hereditary peers
775

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for the Environment
Questions
Basildon Link 181w
City Challenge 524-5w, 934
City Challenge, Nottingham 934
City Challenge, Wolverhampton 933-4
Council house sales 379w
Countryside stewardship scheme 946
Countryside stewardship scheme, Expenditure 946
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of the Environment 183w
Environment, International conferences 142w
Greater London 179w
Local authorities, Official meetings 275w
Ministers, Greater London 272w
Opinion polls, Dept of the Environment 416w
Pollution control, Non-departmental public bodies 278w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 193-4, 950-5
Publicity, Dept of the Environment 182w
Teesside Development Corporation 937
Telephones, Dept of the Environment 277w
Urban development corporations 937
Waste disposal 222w

"Hex Connection"
15w

Hicks, Adrian
(01:07:91) 43-119, 81w, 400w
Armed forces pensions 81w, 282w

Hicks, Mrs Maureen
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 913
Questions
City Challenge, Wolverhampton 933-4
Drug crimes, Crime prevention 210w
Trade unions 1084

Hicks, Mr Robert
Questions
Armed forces married quarters, Empty housing 496w
Cost per pupil, Cornwall 126-7w
Iraq, Disaster relief 429w
Ministry of Defence, Empty property 79w

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 663

Higher civil servants
Civil service agencies 460w
Civil service manpower 257-8w
Dept of Social Security 460w
Ministry of Defence 482w, 518w

Highland Regional Council (Harbours) Order Confirmation Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Lords amendts* (03:07:91) 299

Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Government grants 269-70w

Hill, Mr James
Debates etc.
Housing estates (10:07:91) 961
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 685, 692-4
Questions
Business statements 444-5, 1097-8

Hill, Mr James—continued
Social security benefits reductions, Hospital patients 122w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Questions
Prison staff 425

Hind, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 674
Companies (Subsidiaries in Liquidation) Bill, 1R (09:07:91) 781-3
Housing (02:07:91) 191-2, 197-8
RU486, Points of order (01:07:91) 42, (02:07:91) 180
Questions
AIDS, Inner city areas 406-7w
Arts Council grants, North West region 15
Channel tunnel, Greater Manchester 5
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 10w
Crime, Companies 263w
Foreign investment in UK, Employment opportunities 262w
Horses, Taxation 257w
Pollution control, Mersey Basin 944-5
RU486, Licensing 280w

Hip replacements
408w

Historic buildings
Northern Ireland 286w

HIV infection
165w
Dentists 388w
Pregnant women 129-30w, 507w
Scotland 129-30w
Screening 506-7w
Wales 229w

HM Inspectorate of Pollution
278w, (12:07:91) 1215-36, 1247-86, 194 c1217-38, 1249-88
Integrated pollution control 316w

HMS Challenger
Decommissioning 283w

HMS Endurance
Antarctic 354w
Decommissioning 282w
Falkland Islands 151
Shipbuilding 282w

HMS Onslaught
Decommissioning 281w

HMSO
Northern Ireland 478w

Hobbies
Day release 43w

Hoey, Ms Kate
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 236w
Road accidents, Speed limits 6
Youth training 1083

***Hogg, Mr Douglas**, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 362, 374-9
Questions
Albania, Diplomatic relations 123w
Albania, Know-how Fund 123w
Baltic republics of USSR, Armed forces 205w
CFE Treaty, Disclosure of information 520w
Eastern Europe, Diplomatic service 164w
Iraq, Economic sanctions 300w
Iraq, Nuclear weapons 252w
Iraq, Refugees 420w
Kurdistan, Armed forces deployment 253w
Lebanon, Armed forces deployment 253w
Lebanon, Hostages 521w
National Union of Mineworkers, Intelligence services 24w

Hogg, Mr Douglas—continued
USSR, CFE Treaty 419w
Yugoslavia, Independence movements 123w
Yugoslavia, Self-determination of states 521w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Questions
Roads, Scotland 12w

Holt, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1231, 1276-9, 1286-7
Steel industry (04:07:91) 470
Questions
Teesside Development Corporation 937
Television licences 422

Holy Loch
241w
US bases 245w

Home energy efficiency scheme
Administrative delays 37-8w
Finance 38w

Home Office
Civil service agencies 390w
"Disability Manifesto" 149w
Opinion polls 435w
Publicity 4w, 391-2w, 436w
Telephones 248w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 87-90
Questions
Armed forces recruitment, Scotland 133w
HMS Onslaught, Decommissioning 281w
Tanks, Repairs & maintenance 281w

Homelessness
943
Council housing 941
Leasehold housing 381w
London boroughs 317w
Scotland 167-8w
Wales 445-6w

Hong Kong
520-1w
Airports (04:07:91) 450-8
Ministerial statements (04:07:91) 450-8

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 466

Hordern, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 667

Horn of Africa
Overseas aid 259w

Horses
Export of live animals (05:07:91) 546, (12:07:91) 1215
Public petitions (05:07:91) 546, (12:07:91) 1215
Taxation 257w

Hospital admissions
NHS complaints (05:07:91) 622-8

Hospital beds
Maternity services 110-6w
Mental illness 44-5w

Hospital closures
225w
Northern Ireland 376w
Scotland 236-7w
Tower Hamlets 407w
Wales 230w

Hospital discharges
406w
Chronically sick 188w
Codes of practice 504w

Hospital discharges—continued
Handicapped 188w
Residential care 327-8w

Hospital patients
406w
Social security benefits reductions 122w

Hospital waiting lists
46w, 118w, 505w
East Birmingham Health Authority 54w
Estimates days (04:07:91) 460-536
Heart diseases 285w
Wales 633

Hospitals
South Glamorgan Health Authority 631-2

Hostages
Lebanon 521w

Hotels
Uniform business rate 297-8w, 383w

House condition survey
Scotland 346w
Sutherland 346w

House of Commons
Flowers 211w

House of Commons accommodation
New Parliamentary building 338w

House of Commons Commission
211w

House of Commons debates
Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 479w

House of Commons passes
211w

House of Commons procedure
Lords amendments 339w

House of Commons questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (10:07:91) 964

House of Commons Refreshment Dept
see Refreshment Dept

House of Commons Select Committees
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 895-920

House of Commons (Services) Select Committee
(08:07:91) 709-31

House of Commons times of sittings
44w
House of Commons Select Committees (09:07:91) 895-920

Household Division
490w

Houses
Fire alarms (05:07:91) 594-611

Housing
Opposition days (02:07:91) 187-226
Swansea 631

Housing action trusts
(10:07:91) 956-64

Housing & handicapped
Carers 276w
Housing construction 276w
Housing improvement 276w

Housing association grant
West Yorkshire 141-2w

Housing associations
Expenditure 946-7

Housing benefits
Local government expenditure 326-7w, 394-6w

Housing construction
Housing & handicapped 276w
Leicester 384w

Housing construction—continued
Public sector housing 379w
Scotland 170w
Tower Hamlets 92-4w, 415w
Wales 446w
Warranties 522w

Housing Corporation
141-2w, 946-7

Housing finance
Fishing crews 237w
Paisley 167w
Sutherland 346w
Urban development corporations 180w, 228w

Housing for Wales
630-1
Government grants 447w
Public appointments 447w

Housing improvement
Housing & handicapped 276w

Housing needs index
141-2w

Housing stock
Urban development corporations 180-1w, 228w

***Howard, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for Employment*
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 791-801, 803, 825
Questions
EC Labour & Social Affairs Council 203-5w
EC Social Charter 348w, 761-2, 767-8
EC Social Charter, Costs 761
EC Social Charter, Unemployment 761
EC social policy, EC law 350w
Electrical Electronic Telecommunication & Plumbing Union, Minimum wage 349w
Employment Action 766
Employment Action, Older workers 766-7
Employment level 349w
Employment level, Pay settlements 350w
Employment schemes 767
Industrial training 771-2
Low pay 348w
Minimum wage 349w, 770-1
Minimum wage, USA 770
National vocational qualification 347w
Pink, Graham 767-8

***Howarth, Mr Alan**, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science*
Questions
Advisory Board for the Research Councils, Public expenditure 405w
Agricultural & Food Research Council, Government research establishments 178-9w
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education, Social workers' training 497-8w
Day release, Hobbies 43w
Inner cities initiative, Birmingham 224w
"Laboratories in the 1990's" 40-1w
Medical education, University finance 437w
Nuclear physics, Daresbury 39-40w, 178w, 223-4w, 439w
Nuclear physics, Public sector assets 40w
Science & Engineering Research Council, Capital investment 436w
Science & Engineering Research Council, International cooperation 40-1w
Science & Engineering Research Council, Nuclear physics 40w
Science & technology research, Expenditure 41-2w
Student grants, Science & Engineering Research Council 303w
Student loans, Debts 43w
University teachers, Pay 437w
Veterinary medicine, Animal welfare 153w

Howarth, Mr George
Questions
Housing associations, Expenditure 947

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Questions
Telecommunications industry 157w

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 343-7, 379-80
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 329-30

Howell, Mr Ralph
Questions
Public expenditure 358w

Howells, Mr Geraint
Questions
A44, Road works 191w
Royal Welch Fusiliers 264w
Wales Tourist Board, Advertising 629

Howells, Dr Kim
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1104-5, 1117, 1142, 1156-9
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 271-2, 283
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 333
Questions
Business statements 1099
Foreign investment in UK, Industrial research 301
Refrigerators 636

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Health visitors 225-6w
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison 774-5

Hughes, Mr John
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1137-41
Questions
Cleeland, Paul, Sentencing 434-6w

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1246
Housing (02:07:91) 190
Low incomes (09:07:91) 798
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 655
Questions
Asia, Refugees 157w
Foreign investment in UK, Germany 311
National Audit Office, Manifestos 776
Office of Population Censuses & Surveys, Disclosure of information 334w
Small Firms Service 348w
Zimbabwe, Ministers' visits abroad 259-60w

Hughes, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 566-7, 575, 588-9, 593
Questions
Curriculum, Educational finance 498w
Severn bridge, Accidents 420-1w
Tourism, Wales 629-30

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 569-70, 573
Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 123-8
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1239, 1245
Constitutional Reform Bill, 1R (03:07:91) 340-2
Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991 (01:07:91) 133-5, 137-9
Environment (12:07:91) 1218, 1225, 1255-62
Licensing of Ticket Sales Bill, 2R order read (05:07:91) 618
Power industry (02:07:91) 239-40, 250-2
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 556-8
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 642

Hughes, Mr Simon—continued
Dioxins, Milk 73w
Dioxins, Research 72w
Environmental policy 938
Environmental policy, Treasury 156w
Recycling, EC countries 382-3w
South London, Ministers' domestic visits 450w
Youth unemployment, South London 1082

Human Fertilisation & Embryology (Special Exemptions) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(08:07:91) 708

Human rights
Malawi 428w
Punjab 163-4w
Sri Lanka 325-6w

Humber bridge
6

Humber Bridge Board
Debts 6

Humberside
Local Government Boundary Commission for England 221-2w, 318-9w, 379w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 322-3

***Hunt, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage (No 2) Bill, 1R (03:07:91) 338
Questions
Cardiff Airport 509-10w
Cardiff Bay 633-4
Cardiff Bay, Employment opportunities 633
Cardiff Bay barrage 447w, 634-5
Coal mining, Redundancy 265w
Economic cooperation 263w
Economic recession, Wales 637-8
Employment level, Wales 312-3w
Employment schemes, Wales 263-4w
Foreign investment in UK, Employment opportunities 262w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 639-40
Health services, Wales 261w
Local government, Wales 639
Local government reform, Wales 263w
Minimum wage, Wales 637
Ministers' visits abroad, USA 313w
Publicity, Welsh Office 388w, 447w
Refrigerators 636
Royal Welch Fusiliers 264w, 312w, 635
Rural areas, Government grants 634
Rural areas, Wales 634-5
Set-aside schemes, Wales 446w
Telephones, Welsh Office 264w
Training, Wales 637
Training & enterprise councils, Public appointments 447-8w
Unemployment, Wales 261w, 637
Urban development corporations, Housing finance 228w
Urban development corporations, Housing stock 228w
Urban development corporations, Training 228w
USA, Ministers' visits abroad 508w
Welsh Assembly 638-9

Hunt, Sir John
Questions
Identity cards 207w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 476w
Dental therapists, Dentures 188w
Industrial investment 156w
Manufactured exports 160-1w
Political refugees 210w

***Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas**, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc.
Hong Kong, Ministerial statements (04:07:91) 450-8
Yugoslavia, Ministerial statements (03:07:91) 328-35
Questions
European Security Conference 238w
Iraq, Chemical weapons 124-5w
Republic of Ireland, Students 164w

Hydrocarbon oil duties
EC action (02:07:91) 290

ICI
636
Industrial research 307-8
Takeovers 299-300
Wales 254w

Identification of criminals
Telephone systems 322-4w

Identity cards
207w, 218w

Immigrant doctors
Mutual recognition of qualifications 119w

Immigrants
Crime 220w

Immigration
206w, 249w
Intergovernmental conference 220w

Immigration applications
Legal advice & assistance 297w
Pakistan 163w
Primary purpose rule 424-5

Immigration (Carriers' Liability Prescribed Sum) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 165-78

Import controls
Obscenity 425w

Import of live animals
Birds 162w, 217w, 371-2w
Parrots 371-2w

Imports
Hazardous wastes 141w, 444w

Incinerators
Dioxins 132w
Hazardous wastes 413w
Maydown 500w, 1078
Northern Ireland 26w, 284w
Pollution control 284w

Income support
Mortgages 328w
Residential care 217-8w, 246w
Tower Hamlets 326w

Income tax
Tax allowances 8w

Income tax assessment
257-8w

Incontinence
Health services 408w

Independence movements
Yugoslavia 123w

Independent Living Fund
457w

Independent Unions Training Council
201w

Industrial democracy
EC action (09:07:91) 918-21

Industrial design
97w

Industrial development
158w

Industrial disputes
Newhaven-Dieppe ferry 291w
Prison staff 512w

Industrial investment
156w

Industrial production
157w

Industrial relations
Prison staff 512-3w

Industrial research
Expenditure 160
Foreign investment in UK 301
ICI 307-8

Industrial training
771-2

Industrial wastes
Polychlorinated biphenyl 56w

Industry
308
Group of Seven 517w

Industry & Trade Select Committee
see Trade & Industry Select Committee

Infectious diseases
Clinical wastes 470w

Inflation
307-8

In-flight refuelling
Air pollution 211w

Information
NHS trusts 330w

Information technology
Balance of trade 159w

Information Technology Services Agency
397w, 459-60w
Pay incentives 459w

Ingram, Mr Adam
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 488

Injuries
Animals 98-9w
Dogs 98-9w

Inland Revenue
297-8w
Civil service manpower 299w

Inland waterways
Water pollution 95w

Inner cities initiative
Birmingham 224w
Hackney 323w

Inner city areas
AIDS 406-7w

Inner city partnerships
Hackney 274-5w

Inner London boroughs
AIDS 406-7w

Inquiries
Armed forces casualties 239w
Army Act 1955 76w
Child care 237w
Evidence 641
West Midlands Police 207w

Insolvency Service
Accounting 255w
Crown prosecutors 256w
Prosecutions 255w
Yorkshire & Humberside 18w, 255-6w

Inspections
Set-aside schemes 442w
Shipping safety 291-2w

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales
Company investigations 160w

Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
450w

Insurance
Investor protection 356w

Insurance Brokers' Registration Act 1977
Questions
356w

Insurance Services Group
20-1w

Integrated pollution control
91w
HM Inspectorate of Pollution 316w

Intelligence services
National Union of Mineworkers 24w

Interest charges
Severn bridge 309w

Interest payments
256-8w

Intergovernmental conference
(01:07:91) 21-41, 123w
Immigration 220w

International Atomic Energy Agency
291w
Nuclear safeguards 245w

International Chamber of Commerce
517w

International conferences
Biotechnology 416w
Environment 142w
Environment protection 450w

International cooperation
Forest protection 326w
Nuclear powered vessels 241w
Science & Engineering Research Council 40-1w

International investments
Company liquidations 375-6w
Criminal investigation 375-6w

International Labour Organisation
154w

International Maritime Bureau
83w

International Military Services
242w
Company liquidations 483w
Iraq 241-2w

Invalid care allowances
Take-up 65w

"Inventory of Radioactive Material Entering the Marine Environment"
250w

Inverclyde
473-4w
RENAVAL 473w
Sixth form education 472w

Investment trusts
Unit Trust Association 325w

Investor protection
Insurance 356w

Inward
North West region 355-6w

IRA
(01:07:91) 43-119

Iraq
Armed forces deployment 78w
Arms trade 149, 241-2w
Chemical weapons 124-5w
Disaster relief 429w
Economic sanctions 300w
Health aid 260w
International Military Services 241-2w
Missing persons 23w

***Iraq**—continued*
Nuclear weapons 150, 252w, 775
Overseas aid 428w
Refugees 206w, 420w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
253w
Air force 135w
Air pollution 211w
Air targeting systems 239-40w
ALARM missiles 240w
Armed forces casualties 484w
Chemical weapons 342w
Mental illness 143-4w

Ireland
Hazardous wastes 141w

Iron & steel industry
Estimates days (04:07:91) 460-536
Scotland 314

Irradiated food
Food labelling 341w

Irrigation
Licensing 166w

Irvine, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 34
Questions
Air force bases, US bases 134-5w
EC Social Charter 761-2
Regional airports 9w

Islands
Northern Ireland 125w

Islay
Wild geese 342-3w

***Jack, Mr Michael**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Child benefit 246w, 329w
Child Support Agency 461w
Family credit, Self-employed 196-7w
Family credit, Social security benefits disqualification 397w
Family credit, Social security benefits rules 398-9w
Family credit, Take-up 66w
Personal income 63w

***Jackson, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State for Employment*
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 408-12
Questions
Astra Training Services 202w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 763
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Employment 154-5w
Disabled workers 107w
Disabled workers, Employment discrimination 350w
Disabled workers, Neath 772-3
Disabled workers, Training 295w
Electrical Contractors' Association, Training & enterprise councils 71-2w
Employment level, Congleton 294w
Employment level, Rugby 350w
Employment level, Tower Hamlets 293w
Employment opportunities 352w
Employment schemes, Hackney 293w
Employment schemes, Tower Hamlets 292w
Employment training 68w, 465w
Employment training, Special training needs 108w, 155w, 202w
Employment training, Surveys 68w
Food industry, Manpower 202-4w
Jobclubs, Chelmsford 763
Jobclubs, White-collar workers 762-3
Low pay 108w
Minimum wage 768
National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People, Public appointments 108-9w

***Jackson, Mr Robert**—continued*
Non-statutory training organisations 295-6w
Opinion polls, Dept of Employment 464-5w
Publicity, Dept of Employment 72w, 390w, 465w
Racial discrimination 200-1w
Refugees, Employment training 463w
Skillcentres, Privatisation 69-71w
Special training needs 216w
Textile industry, Redundancy 109w
Training 462-4w
Training, Sheffield 347w
Training, Stockport 348w
Training, Young people 764-5
Training & enterprise councils, South West region 349w
Unemployment 768-9
Unemployment, Congleton 294w
Unemployment, EC countries 768
Unemployment, Leyton 348w
Unemployment, Men 389w
Unemployment, Tower Hamlets 349w
Unemployment benefits, Civil service manpower 71w
Youth training 465-6w, 766
Youth training, Bridging allowances 466w
Youth training, Contracts 294w
Youth training, Lancashire 108w
Youth training, St Ives 765
Youth training, Training & enterprise councils 765-6

Janman, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 175
Unemployment (03:07:91) 390, 394-7, 407
Questions
Economic & monetary union 161
Immigration applications , Primary purpose rule 424

Janner, Mr Greville
Debates etc.
Business questions interventions (11:07:91) 1092
Le Pen, Jean-Marie, Points of order (03:07:91) 336
Questions
Business statements 445-6, 1094-5
Housing construction, Leicester 384w

Japan
Foreign investment in UK 158-9w, 301

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 41
Questions
Music, Greater London 14

Job satisfaction
Civil service 5w

Jobclubs
Chelmsford 763
White-collar workers 762-3

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 65-6, 77-80

Johnston, Sir Russell
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 452
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 330
Questions
Economic & monetary union 161
Pedestrian crossings, Nairn 469w
Yugoslavia, Self-determination of states 521w

Johnstone
Clinics 128w
Dept of Social Security local offices 197-200w

Joint Nature Conservation Committee
317-8w, (12:07:91) 1215-36, 1247-86, 194 c1217-38, 1249-88

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.

***Jones, Mr Barry**—continued*
Royal Welch Fusiliers, Public petitions (08:07:91) 733
Questions
Blue ear pig disease, Wales 190w
Coal mining, Redundancy 265w
Dental services, Schools 312w
Economic recession, Wales 637-8
Employment training, Wales 192w
Gypsies, Gresford 229w
Homelessness, Wales 445-6w
Housing construction, Wales 446w
Housing for Wales, Government grants 447w
Housing for Wales, Public appointments 447w
ICI, Wales 254w
Physical education 445w
Playing fields, Schools 388w
Pre-School Playgroups' Association, Clwyd 311w
Pre-School Playgroups' Association, Wales 311-2w
Royal Welch Fusiliers 312w, 635
School buildings, Capital investment 386w
School meals, Wales 444-5w
Severn bridge, Debts 309w
Ysgol Belmont 312w

Jones, Mr Gwilym
Debates etc.
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 721-3
Questions
Armed forces recruitment 342w
Employment opportunities, Wales 773
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 639-40
South Glamorgan Health Authority 632

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Questions
A5, Road works 264w
Braille, Educational assessment 126w
Braille, General certificate of secondary education 101w
Contaminated land registers, Government grants to local authorities 90-1w
Disabled Persons (Services Representation & Consultation) Act 1986 67w
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 1-3w
Industrial development 158w
Integrated pollution control 91w
Livestock, Waste disposal 147w, 190w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution control 91-2w
Physical education, Wales 146w
Playing fields, Schools 147w
Sheep dipping 162w
Slaughterhouses, EC law 131w
Sports facilities, Schools 146w
Teachers, Wales 29-32w
Training, Wales 637
Transport 2000, Conferences 13w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Wave power 37w
Welsh Office, Rural areas 27-8w

Jones, Mr Martyn
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 113
Questions
Arts finance, Wales 5w
Firing ranges, Licensing 135w
Rural areas, Government grants 634

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 570-3, 586-8, 590-1
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 903
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 352-4

Judgments
Local education authorities 404w
Maguire Seven 87w

Judiciary
Public appointments 68w
Scotland 68w

Juries
247w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 450-1
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 329

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 98-100

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 525-6

Kent
Networker trains 17w

Kenya Wildlife Trust
Upper Waiting Hall 498w

***Key, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc.
Community charge (12:07:91) 1290, 1292-6
Olympic Games, Manchester (04:07:91) 539-44
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Local authorities 944
Boundary commissions, Local government constituencies 220w
City Challenge 181-2w
Community charge, Armed forces 377w
Community charge, London boroughs 315-6w
Community charge, Non-payment 181w
Community charge, Tower Hamlets 315w
Council tax, Mentally handicapped 182w
Government grants to local authorities 55-6w, 377-8w
Inner city partnerships, Hackney 274-5w
Local government audit, Local government politics 380w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England 221w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Humberside 221-2w, 379w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Official publications 221w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Public appointments 318-9w
Local Government Commission, Public appointments 318w
Local government constituencies, Rotherham 524w
Local government finance, Orders & regulations 377w
Local government reform 55w, 943
Local government reform, Derbyshire 943
Local government revenue 95-6w
Local government services, Contracts for services 939-40
Local government services, Liverpool 940
Local government staff, Manpower 380w
London boroughs, Debts 274w
Mentally handicapped, Government grants to local authorities 95w
Mentally handicapped, Revenue support grant 56w
Parish councils, Election expenses 413w
Property development, Newcastle upon Tyne 277w
Rate arrears 315w
Rate arrears, Tower Hamlets 383w
Standard spending assessments, Census of population 272w
Standard spending assessments, Greenwich 272w
Standard spending assessments, One parent families 273w
3D, Shareholders 56w
Uniform business rate, Greater London 179w
Uniform business rate, Hotels 383w
Uniform business rate, Non-payment 933
Uniform business rate, Sports facilities 524w
Urban development corporations 181w
Urban development corporations, Housing finance 180w

***Key, Mr Robert**—continued*
Urban development corporations, Housing stock 180-1w
Urban development corporations, Tourism 180w
Urban development corporations, Training 179-80w
Urban programme, Expenditure 57w

Keynsham
240w

Kidney machines
Northern Ireland 1077-8

Kidney patients
1077-8

Kilfedder, Mr James
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1016-9, 1030
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 324
Questions
Business statements 1093
Ministry of Defence, Higher civil servants 518w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 475w

Kilfoyle, Peter
Debates etc.
Members' oath & affirmation, Kilfoyle, Peter (09:07:91) 777

Kilmarnock
Textile industry (03:07:91) 414-20

King, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1232-4, 1261, 1279-81, 1287
Members' imprisonment, Points of order (12:07:91) 1215-6
Ministers of the Crown (Financial Interests) Bill, 1R (02:07:91) 186
Questions
Crime prevention panels, Young offenders 206w
Handicap benefits, Orders & regulations 199-200w
M40, Motorway service areas 309w
Manufacturing industries, West Midlands 306
Regional arts boards, Arts finance 14

***King, Rt Hon Tom**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 63, 67, 114
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Kurdistan 134w, 152-3
Defence review, Armed forces recruitment 155-6
Defence review, Armed forces strength 154-6
Defence review, Armed forces training 155
Defence review, Civil service manpower 213w
Defence review, Royal Irish Rangers 156
Iraq, Nuclear weapons 150
NATO, Rapid deployment forces 149-50
Rapid deployment forces, Defence review 150
"Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1991" 136w
Territorial Army, Armed forces recruitment 133w
Turkey, Refugees 153

King's Cross Railways Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (04:07:91) 421, (11:07:91) 1067

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 23-4
Questions
Economic growth 773-4

***Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil**—continued*
Economic recession 159-60
Water companies, Pay 434

Kirklees Borough Council
Public petitions (03:07:91) 413
Tenants' choice 946-7

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 806-9
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 718-21
Questions
Day care of children, Fees & charges 473-4w
War Pensioners' Welfare Service 64w
War pensions, Exservicemen 150-1w
War pensions committees 63-4w

Knapman, Mr Roger
Questions
Civil service agencies 17-8
Contracts of employment 764
Crime prevention, Public participation 433
EC Fisheries Council 341w
Regional aid, Cornwall 311

Knight, Dame Jill
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 905, 914-5
Questions
RU486, Clinical trials 225w
Squatting 429

Know-how Fund
516w
Albania 123w

Knox, Mr David
Questions
Cost per pupil, Secondary education 262w
Council house sales 379w
NHS, Staffordshire 164-5w
Prison population 432

Kurdistan
78w
Armed forces deployment 134w, 152-3, 253w
Overseas aid 370-2w

Kuwait
British residents abroad 124w, 253w

Labelling
Drugs 316-7
Tobacco 457w

"Laboratories in the 1990's"
40-1w

Labour Party
436, 776
Defence 1080-1, 1083

Lakin Consortium
69-70w

Lambeth
Skillcentres 70w

Lamond, Mr James
Questions
Minimum wage 768

***Lamont, Rt Hon Norman**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Questions
Bank loans 424-5w
Commemorative coins 156w
"Disability Manifesto", Treasury 156-7w
EC Finance Council 367-8w
Money supply 367w
National Union of Civil & Public Servants, Pay settlements 425w

Lanarkshire
(04:07:91) 460-536

Lancashire
Youth training 108w

Land
Powers of entry (03:07:91) 338, (05:07:91) 621

Land acquisition
Defence land 136w, 487w

Land Authority for Wales
31w

Land Drainage Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Land ownership & tenure
Falkland Islands 300w
Scotland 343w

***Lang, Rt Hon Ian**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 130w
Fishing crews, Housing finance 237w
NHS pensions, Retail price index 67w
Opinion polls, Scottish Office 473w
Publicity, Scottish Office 131w, 515w
Scottish Office, Ministerial duties 127w
Scottish Office, Ministerial policy advisors 128w
Scottish Office, Public appointments 265-9w
Telephones, Scottish Office 271w

Languages education
Curriculum 440w
Educational standards 440w
Greater London 160w

Latham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Housing estates (10:07:91) 959-60
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 326
Questions
Assisted places scheme 125w
Defence industries, Redundancy 148-9, 518-9w
Electrical Contractors' Association, Training & enterprise councils 71-2w
Police stations, Oakham 106w

Law enforcement
Sunday trading 150w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Trade marks 98w

Lawrence, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 357-61
Political refugees (02:07:91) 175
Questions
Business statements 1095

Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Questions
Bank loans 424-5w
Money supply 367w

Le Pen, Jean Marie
424

Leasehold housing
Homelessness 381w
Sheltered housing 93w

Leasing industrial equipment
Accounting 324w

Lebanon
Armed forces deployment 253w
Hostages 521w

Leeds
Racial harassment 149w

Leeds General Infirmary
AIDS 47w

Legal advice & assistance
Immigration applications 297w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service 322w

Legal aid
Racial discrimination 87w
Refugees 433-4w

Legal Aid Board
Repossession orders 497w

Legal costs
Elmbridge Borough Council 245w
Health Care Corporation 245w

Legislation
Friendly societies 430w
Northern Ireland 1071

Leicester
Housing construction 384w

***Leigh, Mr Edward** Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs*
Questions
Bass, Government assistance 522w
Coal mining, EC grants & loans 308
Compact discs, Prices 300
Compact discs, Production 300
Computer Misuse Act 1990, Convictions 237-8w
Consumer protection, EC internal trade 18-9w
Defence industries, Product development 325w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Trade & Industry 161w
Dogs, Injuries 98-9w
Domestic accidents, Death 522w
Drugs 357-8w
Drugs, Patents 19w, 98w
EC grants & loans, EC integration 308-9
Economic & monetary union, Germany 311-2
Exchange rate mechanism 312
Federation of Catering Equipment Suppliers 18w
Foreign investment in UK 311
Foreign investment in UK, Germany 311
Foreign investment in UK, Japan 158-9w
Funerals 306-7
Funerals, Codes of practice 307
Industrial design 97w
Industrial development 158w
Inner cities initiative, Hackney 323w
Inward, North West region 355-6w
Languages education, Greater London 160w
LINK programme, Expenditure 96-7w
"Markets for Environmental Monitoring Instrumentation" 325w
Opinion polls, Dept of Trade & Industry 523w
Post Office 161w
Product safety 316-7
Publicity, Dept of Trade & Industry 20w, 523w
Regional aid 309
Regional aid, Cornwall 311
Regional aid, Development areas 159w
Shipbuilding 159w
Small businesses, Truro 310-1
Space technology 356-7w
Strategic programme for innovation & technology transfer 100w
STRIDE programme, Defence industries 100w
Trade marks, Law reform 98w

Leighton, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 381-7, 410
Questions
Price increases 100w
Uniform business rate, Greater London 179w
Youth training, Training & enterprise councils 765

Leith
Dock labour scheme 769-70

***Lennox-Boyd, Mr Mark**, Under-Secretary of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 872-4, 886, 888-91, 893-4
Questions
Africa, Disaster relief 520w
All party groups, Government grants 300w
Arms control 300w
CFE Treaty 354w
Falkland Islands, Land ownership & tenure 300w
"Gulf Between Us" 23w
Guyana, Elections 24w
Hong Kong 520-1w
Immigration applications, Pakistan 163w
Iraq, Missing persons 23w
Kuwait, British residents abroad 124w, 253w
Lockerbie, Disclosure of information 238w
Lockerbie, Syrian Arab Republic 238w
Mercenaries, Treaties 22w
Nadin, Peter, Death 354-5w
Opinion polls, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 419w
Parliamentary questions 253w
Philippines, Thomas Cook 123-4w
Publicity, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 24w, 419-20w
Punjab, Human rights 163-4w
Romania, Antisemitism 354w
Treaties 353-4w
UN Secretariat, Official visits 238w
"Yearbook on Arms Control & Environmental Agreements (Verification Report)" 23-4w
Zhongliang, Bishop 419w

Lester, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 356

Lestor, Miss Joan
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 795
Questions
Residential care of children, Local authorities 505-6w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Banks, Points of order (10:07:91) 966-7
Questions
City Challenge 934
Criminal injuries compensation 510-1w
M62, Road works 174w
Right to buy, Commonhold 414-5w

Leyton
Priority routes 16w
Unemployment 348w

Libyan Arab Republic
Lockerbie 238w

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (02:07:91) 182
2R order read (05:07:91) 620

Licensing laws
Scotland (02:07:91) 182

Licensing of Ticket Sales Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

Lie detectors
Civil service 507w

Life expectancy
407w

Lighting
Police vehicles 322w

***Lilley, Rt Hon Peter**, Secretary of State for Trade & Industry*
Questions
Car industry, West Midlands 306
Confederation of British Industry 162w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter—continued
Economic recession 159w, 301-3
Economic recession, Northern region 302
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Privatisation 20-1w
Foreign companies in UK 299
ICI, Takeovers 299-300
ICI, Wales 254w
Industrial production 157w
Manufacturing industries, West Midlands 305-6
Mergers, EC action 310
Metrication, EC law 99w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, British Steel Corporation 309-10
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Foreign investment in UK 309
Motor industry, Exports 302-3
Nationalisation 159w
Telecommunications industry 157w, 177w
Telecommunications industry, Competition 315
Telecommunications industry, Market Share 314-5

Lincoln
74w
Blue ear pig disease 73w
Veterinary Investigation Service 73w

Lindane
336w

LINK programme
Expenditure 96-7w

Litter
Local government functions 384w

Liverpool
Community charge 936
Local government 436-7
Local government services 940

Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line
Investment 11w

Liverpool Walton
436

Livestock
Wales 147w, 190w
Waste disposal 147w, 190w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Amusement arcades, Planning permission (01:07:91) 140-3
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 332
Questions
Prisoners' transfers, Northern Ireland 215w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 50, 67
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 273-4, 284-5, 289
Questions
Health services, Wales 261w
Rural areas, Wales 634-5

Lloyd, Sir Ian
Questions
Industrial research, Expenditure 160

Lloyd, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Trespass, Avon (02:07:91) 295-8
Questions
Bingo, Advertising controls 321w
Broadcasting 210w
Channel Three, Broadcasting licences 206w
Commercial television 207w
Commercial television, Broadcasting licences 426-7
Commercial television, Franchising 427
Complaints against police, Compensation 4w
Concessionary television licences 422-3
Crime 208w
Crime victims, Women 208w

Lloyd, Mr Peter—continued
Criminal records, Computer applications 249-50w
Firearms certificates 207w, 247w
Frontiers, EC action 250w
Immigration 206w, 249w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 248w
Naturalisation, Administrative delays 429-30
Passports, Administrative delays 105w
Police 432-3
Police, Basildon 432
Police, Crime victims 208w
Police national computer 103w
Police national computer, Data networks 102w
Police national computer, Disclosure of information 103-5w
Police national computer, Missing persons 102w
Police national computer, Motor vehicle theft 105w
Police national computer, Police records 104w
Police records 102-3w
Police stations, Oakham 106w
Political refugees 210w
Racial attacks 148-9w
Racial harassment, Bradford 149w
Refugees, Iraq 206w
Refugees, Legal aid 433-4w
Taxis, Licensing 101w
Television licences 422, 427
Television licences, Computer privacy 321w
Thames Valley Police, Manpower 209w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service 216w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service, Government grants 321-2w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service, Legal advice & assistance 322w
USSR, Emigration 215w
West Indian immigrants 210w
West Midlands Police, Inquiries 207w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Questions
Chapel-en-le-Frith/Whaley Bridge bypass, Construction costs 421w
EC Social Charter 762
PAYE, Tax yields 8-9w

Lloyd's of London
(02:07:91) 184-6

Loans
Building societies 424-5w

Local authorities
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 939-40, 944, 948
Emergency planning 247w
Official meetings 275w
Residential care of children 505-6w

Local education authorities
Educational finance 497w
Judgments 404w
Special education 402w

Local elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Local enterprise agencies
154w

Local enterprise companies
Forth Valley 513-4w

Local government
Liverpool 436-7
Wales 639

Local government audit
Local government politics 380w

Local Government Boundary Commission for England
221w, 524w

Local Government Boundary Commission for England—continued
Humberside 221-2w, 318-9w, 379w
Official publications 221w
Public appointments 318-9w

Local Government Commission
Public appointments 318w

Local government constituencies
Boundary commissions 220w
Rotherham 524w

Local government expenditure
358w
Community care 342w
Community charge benefits 394-6w
Housing benefits 326-7w, 394-6w
Rent allowances 395w
Rent rebates 395w
Schools 236w
Scotland 129w, 361-4w
Special education 304-8w
Voluntary organisations 417-9w
Wales 34w, 361-4w

Local government finance
95w, 314w
Economic models 523w
Orders & regulations 377w
Scotland 129w, 171-2w

Local government functions
Emergency planning 391-4w
Litter 384w

Local government politics
Local government audit 380w

Local government reform
55w, 943
Derbyshire 943
Wales 263w

Local government revenue
95-6w
Scotland 375w
Wales 34w

Local government services
Competition 380-1w
Contracts for services 127w, 434-5, 939-40
Liverpool 940
Scotland 127w

Local government social services
280w
Mentally handicapped 117w
Residential care 333-4w

Local government staff
Manpower 380w
Political activities 94w

Lockerbie
Disclosure of information 238w
Libyan Arab Republic 238w
Syrian Arab Republic 238w

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Castleford Normanton & District Hospital, Public petitions (10:07:91) 1059
Power industry (02:07:91) 242-3
Questions
Standard spending assessments 379w

London allowance
Civil service 364-6w

London boroughs
Community charge 315-6w
Community charge exemptions 315-6w
Debts 274w
Emergency planning 320-1w
Empty property 316-8w
Homelessness 317w
Nursery schools 241w
Teachers 243w

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham etc) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order to proceed in next Session (10:07:91) 931-2, (11:07:91) 1065-6

London East Training & Enterprise Council
292w

London Local Authorities Bill (HL) 1989/90
Debates etc.
3R* (02:07:91) 147

London Regional Transport
15w, (09:07:91) 835-71

London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (04:07:91) 421
2R (09:07:91) 835-71

London Underground
420w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 15w

London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill (HL) 1989/90
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (10:07:91) 931
Rep* (11:07:91) 1065

Londonderry
Terrorism 230-2w

Lord, Mr Michael
Questions
Tobacco, Labelling 457w

Lords amendments
House of Commons procedure 339w

Lorries
Speed governors 174w, 287w

Low flying
Air accidents 79-80w
Complaints 133w
RAF Leeming 399w
Scotland 133w
Wales 79-80w

Low incomes
Opposition days (09:07:91) 784-834

"Low Level Waste Disposal"
276w

Low pay
108w, 348w

Low rateable value areas grants
58-64w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Questions
Local government, Liverpool 436-7
Shipbuilding, Manpower 479w

Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 455-6
Questions
Standard spending assessments, District councils 414w

Luxembourg
Foreign trade 96w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas, Solicitor-General
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 641-2
Family Law & Administration Working Party 173w
Serious Fraud Office 642-3
Small claims 642
Town & country planning 643

M4
Road accidents 11w

M11
421w
Environmental impact assessment 139w

M20
421w

M40
139w, 421w
Construction materials 175w

M40—continued
Motorway service areas 309w

M62
Road works 174w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 245-7
Questions
Annual reports, Customs & Excise 298-9w
Civil service agencies, Annual reports 397w
Civil service agencies, Finance 420w
Civil service agencies, Home Office 390w
Civil service agencies, Performance indicators 397w
Civil service manpower, Dept of Social Security 327-8w
Council house sales, Scotland 514w
Day care of children, Customs & Excise 298w
Day care of children, Dept of Social Security 328w
"Future of the Careers Service (Scotland) Consultation Paper" 347w
Higher civil servants, Dept of Social Security 460w
Natural Resources Institute 369-70w
Pay incentives, Customs & Excise 298w
Pay incentives, Information Technology Services Agency 459w
Performance indicators, Customs & Excise 298w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 953
Publicity, Dept of Social Security 459w
Vocational guidance, Scotland 343w, 374w
Working hours, Customs & Excise 257w
Working hours, Dept of Social Security 327w

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Questions
Economic recession 301-2

McCartney, Mr Ian
Questions
North West Water Group, Directors 945

McCrea, Rev William
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 1072

McCrindle, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 671
Questions
Banks, Small businesses 304
Business statements 448-9, 1092

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 370-1
Questions
Banks, Small businesses 303-4
RNAD Coulport, Construction 157
Telephone tapping 428

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 987, 995, 1010-6
Questions
Heart diseases, Hospital waiting lists 285w
Heart diseases, Northern Ireland 284w
Northern Ireland government 1070-1

MacGregor, Rt Hon John, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business motions (08:07:91) 732
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 895-8
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 727-31
Questions
Business statements 439-49, 1085-101
European Standing Committees, Training 338w
House of Commons passes 211w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John—continued
House of Commons times of sittings 44w
Lords amendments, House of Commons procedure 339w
New Parliamentary building, House of Commons accommodation 338w
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 338-9w
Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology 281w

Machine tools industry
304

McKay, Mr Allen
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 577
Housing (02:07:91) 200
Housing estates (10:07:91) 963

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 39
Questions
Business statements 1091-2
City Challenge 524-5w
Petroleum exploration licences 424w
Thames Valley Police, Manpower 209w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 1079

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Textile industry, Kilmarnock (03:07:91) 414-7, 419

Maclean, Mr David, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture Fisheries & Food
Questions
Birds, Import of live animals 162w, 217w, 371-2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 216-7w
Dioxins, Milk 73w, 132w, 339-40w, 519w
Dioxins, Research 72w
Dioxins, Safety measures 131w
Parrots, Import of live animals 371-2w
Sheep dipping 162w
Sheep dipping, Chemicals 73w
Sheep dipping, Health hazards 519w
Slaughterhouses, EC law 131w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 404-8
Questions
Employment schemes 767
Employment training 465w
Fife Scottish Omnibuses, Privatisation 345w
Regional development grants, Disclosure of information 344w
Skillcentres, Privatisation 69-71w
Training, Disclosure of information 345-6w
Unemployment benefits, Civil service manpower 71w
Youth training 465-6w
Youth training, Bridging allowances 466w
Youth training, Contracts 294w

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 170
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 652-3
Questions
House condition survey, Scotland 346w
House condition survey, Sutherland 346w
Housing finance, Sutherland 346w
Market information enquiry service, Administrative costs 253-4w
Police 431
Regional arts boards 14-5

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick, Under-Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
Air routes, Gibraltar 292w
Air traffic control, France 11w
Air traffic control, Gibraltar 84w
Air transport, EC action 12w
American Airlines, Conditions of employment 140w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick—continued
Bus services, Surveys 15w
Decca Navigator System 8-9
Dept of Transport, Members' correspondence 139-40w
EC transport policy 290w
Ferries 85w
Ferries, Shipping safety 84-6w
International Maritime Bureau 83w
MFV Antares, Shipping accidents 8
MFV Wilhelmina J, Shipping accidents 308w
Newhaven-Dieppe ferry, Industrial disputes 291w
Piracy, Merchant ships 83w
Pontypool-Newport railway line, Investment 16w
Public transport, Energy conservation 290w
Publicity, Dept of Transport 86w
RAF Northolt, Air transport 84w
Railway accidents, Bradford-on-Tone 84w
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 11-2
Regional airports 9w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Shipping safety 175w
Shipping 140w
Shipping accidents 9, 85w, 353w
Shipping accidents, Transport of radioactive materials 291w
Shipping safety 9
Shipping safety, Inspections 291-2w
Ships, Safety standards 291w
Transport of radioactive materials, Uranium 15w
Vale of Glamorgan railway 1-2
Water transport, River Thames 308w

McMaster, Mr Gordon
Questions
Attendance allowance, Terminal care 151w
Clinics, Johnstone 128w
Council of Ministers 22-3w
Councillors, Working hours 127w
Councillors' allowances, Scotland 127w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Johnstone 197-200w
Disabled workers 107w
Elderslie Hospital, Community care 129w
European Standing Committees, Training 338w
Exports 313
Government grants to local authorities, Scotland 168-70w
Greenbelt, Scotland 170w
Greenhouse effect 379-80w
Homelessness, Scotland 167-8w
Housing construction, Scotland 170w
Housing finance, Paisley 167w
Local government finance, Scotland 129w, 171-2w
Local government services, Contracts for services 127w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 6w
Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley, Security 128w
Scottish Office, Ministerial duties 127w
Scottish Office, Ministerial policy advisors 128w
Scottish Office, Public appointments 265-9w
Social security appeals 65w
Wallace, William, Cultural heritage 67w

McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Points of order (03:07:91) 337
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 333
Questions
Disabled workers, Employment discrimination 350w
Kidney machines, Northern Ireland 1077-8
Obscenity, Import controls 425w
UK trade with EC 305
Yugoslavia, EC external relations 218-9w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 320-1
Questions
Northern Ireland government 1070
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 1073

McWilliam, Mr John
Questions
Dept of Education & Science, Civil service manpower 402w
Space technology 356-7w

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 35-6
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 454
Political refugees (02:07:91) 176-7
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 763
Business statements 447
Chahal, Karamji Singh 432
Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals, University finance 110w
Council tax, Mentally handicapped 182w
Dietary foods, Prescriptions 119-20w
European Council, EC immigration 183w
Racial harassment, Bradford 149w
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 11-2
Republic of Ireland, Students 164w

Madel, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 36

Maghreb
215w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 331
Questions
Northern Ireland health & social services boards, Finance 479w
Police Authority for Northern Ireland 1072
Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry, Costs 478w

Magistrates' courts
Rate arrears 149-50w

Maguire Seven
Judgments 87w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 511, 516
Questions
Fish, Pesticides 515w
Government grants to local authorities 377w
Machine tools industry 304
Pink, Graham 767-8
Police, West Yorkshire 206w
Sea pollution, North Sea 515-6w

Maidstone bypass
Road works 421w

Major, Rt Hon John, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Debates etc.
European Council, Ministerial statements (01:07:91) 21-41
Questions
Arms control 516w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 775-6, 1083-4
Billing, Government departments 245w
Brewing industry, Public houses 311w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 162-3
Budget, Disclosure of information 310w
Building societies, Taxation 1082-3
By elections, Militant tendency 436
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 452w
Child benefit, Statistics 218w

Major, Rt Hon John—continued
China, Greenhouse effect 450w
China, USA 310w
Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals, University finance 110w
Community charge 245w
Conservative Party 777
Council of Europe, UK delegations 110w
Defence review 437-8, 1082
Directors, Pay 159, 773, 1080
"Disability Manifesto", Prime Minister 184w
Eastern Europe, Overseas aid 516w
Economic & monetary union 161-2
Economic growth 435, 773-4
Economic recession 159-60, 1081-2
Educational policy 435
Employment opportunities, Wales 773
Environment protection, Conferences 450w
Environment protection, International conferences 450w
Environment protection, Non-departmental public bodies 453w
Environmental policy, Expenditure 452w
European Council, EC immigration 183w
Fish, Pesticides 515w
Group of Seven, Environmental policy 517w
Group of Seven, Industry 517w
Health Care Corporation, Legal costs 245w
Hereditary peers 775
Identity cards 218w
Immigrants, Crime 220w
Immigration, Intergovernmental conference 220w
Industrial research, Expenditure 160
Iraq, Nuclear weapons 775
Labour Party, Defence 1083
Local government, Liverpool 436-7
Local government services, Contracts for services 434-5
Manufacturing industries 436
Minimum wage 433-5, 775
Ministers, Departmental correspondence 110w
National Audit Office, Manifestos 776
Natural Environment Research Council, UK contributions 450w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 6w
Official engagements 110w, 183w, 453w
One parent families, Statistics 219w
Police, EC countries 219w
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison 774-5
Public expenditure 162
Rain forests, Forest protection 452w
Retirement age 389w
Royal Welch Fusiliers 776
Sea pollution, North Sea 515-6w
Share shops 450w
South London, Ministers' domestic visits 450w
Steroid drugs, Drug abuse 310w
Technical education 436
Trade unions 774, 776-7, 1084
Truancy 163-4
Unemployment 438
United Nations, Alternative energy 450w
US bases, Holy Loch 245w
USA, Foreign policy 219w
Water companies, Pay 434
Women's employment, EC Social Charter 159
World Conservation Monitoring Centre 450-1w
Youth training 1083
Youth training, Training allowances 160-1
Youth unemployment, South London 1082
Yugoslavia, EC external relations 218-9w

Malawi
Human rights 428w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 49

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Questions
Historic buildings, Northern Ireland 286w
Publishing, Northern Ireland 478w
Student grants, Northern Ireland 235w

Manchester
462-4w
Concert halls 220w

Manchester Airport
(10:07:91) 1060-6

Manifestos
National Audit Office 776

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1219, 1222, 1226, 1229, 1235, 1281-3, 1286
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 726-7
Questions
Developing countries, Government 645

Manufactured exports
160-1w

Manufacturing industries
436
West Midlands 305-6

***Maples, Mr John**, Economic Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Ministerial statements (08:07:91) 660-74
Questions
Advertising agencies, Government contracts 87-8w, 358w, 364-5w
Advisory Committee on Advertising 358-62w
Advisory Committee on Advertising, Public appointments 357-8w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 257-8w
Banks, Small businesses 299w
Building societies, Taxation 256w, 525w
Capital movements 87w
Friendly societies, Legislation 430w
Industrial investment 156w
Non-domestic rates 142w
Price increases 100w
Publishing, Northern Ireland 478w
Woolwich Building Society, Taxation 88w, 297w, 425w

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 51
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 453
Questions
Air routes, Gibraltar 292w
Air traffic control, Gibraltar 84w
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 10
Civil service agencies, Social security benefits 18
Expo 92, Crown colonies 521w
Falkland Islands, Land ownership & tenure 300w
Gibraltar, Expo 92 239w

Marine Accident Investigations Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

Market information enquiry service
Administrative costs 253-4w

Market Share
Telecommunications industry 314-5

"Markets for Environmental Monitoring Instrumentation"
325w

Marland, Mr Paul
Questions
Youth training 766

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 656-7
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 334

Marlow, Mr Tony*—*continued
Questions
Dogs, Injuries 98-9w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Cars, Children 13w
Naval bases 134w
Rear seat belts 14w
Transport, Safety measures 84w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 978-82

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 820
Questions
Centre for Policy Studies, Annual reports 297w
EC Social Charter 348w
Hip replacements 408w
London Underground, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 15w
Owner occupied housing, Northern Ireland 477w
Romania, Antisemitism 354w
Small claims 642
Trident 134w
Uniform business rate, Non-payment 933
Voluntary schools 439w
Voluntary schools, Barnet 303-4w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 644

Marshall, Sir Michael
Questions
Employment Action, Older workers 766-7

Martin, Mr David
Questions
MFV Wilhelmina J, Shipping accidents 308w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Debates etc.
Stobhill Hospital (09:07:91) 924-6
Questions
Fire regulations, Building Regulations Advisory Committee 147-8w
Shipbuilding 159w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Questions
Defence review, Armed forces strength 155

Maternity services
Hospital beds 110-6w

***Maude, Mr Francis**, Financial Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Building societies, Taxation 256-8w
Car allowances 176w
European currency unit 366-7w
Fringe benefits, Tax allowances 258w
Horses, Taxation 257w
Income tax assessment 257-8w
Inland Revenue, Civil service manpower 299w
PAYE, Tax yields 8-9w
Pension funds, Tax allowances 365w
Soft drinks, Tax yields 525w
Tax administration, Next of kin 526w
Tax allowances 7w
Tax allowances, Child care 299w
Tax allowances, Tax yields 8w
Tax collection 176w
Tax yields, Economic growth 525-6w
Taxpayers, Personal income 5-9w
Taxpayers, Tax rates & bands 6w
Uniform business rate, Hotels 297-8w

***Mawhinney, Dr Brian**, Minister of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 971-8
Questions
Armagh Four 476w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian*—*continued
Community relations, Northern Ireland 1075-7
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 476w
"Disability Manifesto", Northern Ireland Office 301-4w
"Further Education in Northern Ireland: The Road Ahead" 234w
International investments, Company liquidations 375-6w
Northern Ireland Curriculum Council, Publishing 301w
Police national computer, Northern Ireland 144w
Public order offences, Northern Ireland 125w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 145w
Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry, Costs 478w
Sports, Northern Ireland 1075
Sports, VAT 1074-5
Student grants, Northern Ireland 235w
Telephones, Northern Ireland Office 500w
Terrorism, Compensation 230-2w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 477-8w
Wallace, Colin 478w

Maxton, Mr John
Questions
Low pay 108w
NHS finance, Scotland 195-6w
Public expenditure 175w, 257w
Schools, Local government expenditure 236w
Scottish Enterprise, Government grants 269-70w

Maxwell-Hyslop, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 461-5, 502
Questions
Dept of Transport, Members' correspondence 139-40w
Ministers, Departmental correspondence 110w

May Inquiry
see Guildford Four Inquiry

Maydown
Incinerators 500w, 1078

***Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick**, Attorney-General*
Questions
Arms control negotiations 643-4
Barristers, Evidence 640-1
British National Party, Racial incitement 173w
Centre for Policy Studies, Annual reports 297w
Crime, Companies 263w
Departmental records 1w
Family Law & Administration Working Party 173w
Flags, Newtownards 497w
Immigration applications, Legal advice & assistance 297w
Inquiries, Evidence 641
Legal aid, Racial discrimination 87w
Legal Aid Board, Repossession orders 497w
Maguire Seven, Judgments 87w
Opinion polls, Attorney General 424w
Serious Fraud Office, Annual reports 353w

McAuley, Pearse
(08:07:91) 649-59

McCloy Committee
see Northern Ireland Curriculum Council

McGhee, Charles
Prisoners' transfers 435w

MDS-Transmodal
463-4w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 784-91, 794, 826-8
Questions
Bailiffs, Fees & charges 179w

Meacher, Mr Michael—continued
Computer applications, Dept of Social Security local offices 458-60w
Personal income 63w
Social security payments, Bank services 152w

Meat
Food contamination 443w

Medical education
Expenditure 187-8w
University finance 437w

Medical Qualifications (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R* & rem stages (05:07:91) 620

Medical records
Disclosure of information 280w

Medical research
Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons 165-6w

Medical services committees
Public appointments 118-9w

Medicines Control Agency
Civil service agencies 409w

Meirionnydd
191-2w

Mellor, Rt Hon David, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Billing, Government departments 299w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 361-4w
Public expenditure 175w, 257w, 358w
Unemployed, Per capita costs 363-4w

Members' conduct
Speaker's rulings & statements (11:07:91) 1125, (12:07:91) 1224, 1231

Members' correspondence
Administrative delays 248w
Dept of Transport 139-40w

Members' dress
(03:07:91) 316
Speaker's rulings & statements (04:07:91) 458

Members' facilities
Computers (08:07:91) 709-31

Members' imprisonment
Speaker's rulings & statements (12:07:91) 1215-6

Members' interests
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:07:91) 917

Members' Interests Select Committee
Select committee evidence 17

Members' interventions
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:07:91) 47, 51, 120, (05:07:91) 614, (10:07:91) 1026, (11:07:91) 1101, 1103, 1130, (12:07:91) 1217, 1222

Members' oath & affirmation
Kilfoyle, Peter (09:07:91) 777

Members' speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:07:91) 105, 120, (02:07:91) 192, 294, (03:07:91) 343, 352, (04:07:91) 465, (05:07:91) 594, (08:07:91) 694, (09:07:91) 784, 790, (10:07:91) 1029, (11:07:91) 1138, (12:07:91) 1230, 1266, 1286-8

Men
Unemployment 389w

Menopause
Surveys 117w

Mental health community care
Departmental circulars 117w, 120w
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults 120w

Mental illness
Armed forces 143-4w
Hospital beds 44-5w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 143-4w

Mental illness specific grant
Scotland 235-6w, 342w

Mentally handicapped
Council tax 182w
Finance 52w
Government grants to local authorities 95w
Handicapped children 51-2w
Local government social services 117w
Revenue support grant 56w

Mentally ill
Residential care 329w

Mercenaries
Treaties 22w

Merchant ships
Piracy 83w

Mergers
EC action 310

Mersey Basin
Pollution control 944-5

Mersey Docks & Harbour Bill (HL) 1989/90
Debates etc.
Order to proceed in next Session (09:07:91) 760

Mersey Regional Health Authority
46w

Merseyside & North Wales Electricity Board
1080

Merseyside Arts
15

Merseyside Development Corporation
937

Metrication
EC law 99w, 313-4
Spirits 1077

Metropolitan Police
101-4w, 247w

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 35
Questions
Economic cooperation 263w

MFV Antares
Shipping accidents 8

MFV Wilhelmina J
Shipping accidents 308w

Michael, Mr Alun
Questions
Employment training, Special training needs 101w, 108w, 147w, 155w, 191w, 202w
NHS, Wales 632-3
Special training needs 216w
Special training needs, Wales 229-30w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Homelessness, Leasehold housing 381w
Industrial production 157w
Manufacturing industries 436
Training, Sheffield 347w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Questions
Floods, Warnings 172w
Lebanon, Hostages 521w
Nuclear powered vessels, Emergency planning 241w
Nuclear powered vessels, International cooperation 241w
Nuclear submarines 518w
Salmon, Fish farming 272w
US bases, Holy Loch 245w

Middle schools
42-4w

Midland Metro Bill 1989/90
Debates etc.
3R* (04:07:91) 421

Midland Metro (No 2) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
3R* (10:07:91) 931

Militant tendency
By elections 436

Military aid to civil community
Helicopters 134w

Military attaches
Arab Industrial Organisation 136w
Egypt 136w

Military balance
Nuclear weapons policy 211w

Milk
Dioxins 73w, 75w, 132w, 339-40w, 519w

Miller, Sir Hal
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1221-2, 1270-3
Questions
Motor industry, Exports 302-3

Mills, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 670

Mines
142-3w

Minesweepers
Shipbuilding 214w

Minimum wage
349w, 433-5, 768, 770-1, 775
Electrical Electronic Telecommunication & Plumbing Union 349w
USA 770
Wales 637

Mining
Aggregates 220-1w

Ministerial duties
Scottish Office 127w

Ministerial policy advisors
Poland 416w
Scottish Office 128w

Ministerial powers
Examination boards 243w

Ministerial speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:07:91) 801

Ministerial statements
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 660-74
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1237-46
Council housing (10:07:91) 956-64
European Council (01:07:91) 21-41
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 450-8
Northern Ireland (03:07:91) 319-27
Political refugees (02:07:91) 165-78
Prison escapes (08:07:91) 649-59
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:07:91) 38, 42, (02:07:91) 170, 179-80, 182(03:07:91) 329, (04:07:91) 454, 455, (05:07:91) 567, (08:07:91) 668, (09:07:91) 779-80, (10:07:91) 964, (12:07:91) 1243
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 328-35

Ministers
Conflict of interests (02:07:91) 184-6
Departmental correspondence 110w
Greater London 272w

Ministers' domestic visits
Dental services 448w
South London 450w
Speaker's rulings & statements (04:07:91) 461, 466

Ministers of the Crown (Financial Interests) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (02:07:91) 184-6
2R order read (05:07:91) 621

Ministers' visits abroad
USA 313w, 508w
Zimbabwe 259-60w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food
Opinion polls 441w
Publicity 75w, 373w, 443w

Ministry of Defence
Asbestos 77w
Bristol 240w
Civil service dispersal 240w
Civil service redundancies 483w
Empty property 79w
Higher civil servants 482w, 518w
Opinion polls 489w
Publicity 82w, 401w, 489-91w
Telephones 283w

Ministry of Defence police
RAF Wethersfield 517w
Relocation of employees 517w
Royal ordnance factories 143w

Miscampbell, Mr Norman
Questions
Armed forces training, Accident insurance 240w
Bangladesh, Overseas aid 22w
Youth training, Lancashire 108w

Miscarriages of justice
Bentley, Derek 321w

Missing persons
Iraq 23w
Police national computer 102w

Misuse of Drugs (Anabolic Steroids) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 39
Questions
Developing countries, Government 645
Health service staff, Manpower 329w
Hospital patients 406w
NHS, Nottinghamshire 118w
Police custody, Time limits 150w
Public service pensions, Re-employment 425-6w
Roads, Expenditure 11w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Accountants, Proceeds of crime 160w
Audit, Accountability 254w
Audit, Professional organisations 17w, 254w
Auditing Practices Board, Disclosure of information 18w
Company accounts, Complaints 17w
European Free Trade Association, EC action 254w
Fisheries, Norway 519w
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales, Company investigations 160w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England 221w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Humberside 221-2w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Official publications 221w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Public appointments 318-9w

Mitchell, Sir David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 324-5

Moate, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1181
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1244

Moate, Mr Roger—continued
Questions
Civil servants' secondment, EC institutions 6w
Military aid to civil community, Helicopters 134w
Networker trains, Kent 17w

Mobility allowance
Right of abode 66w

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 976-7
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 321
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 655
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 1071

Monarchy
(03:07:91) 340-2

Money supply
367w

Monopolies
Grocery trade 177w

Monopolies & Mergers Commission
522w
British Steel Corporation 309-10
Foreign investment in UK 309
London Underground 15w
Northern Ireland Railways 144-5w
Soft drinks 323w

Monro, Sir Hector
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 909-10
Ministers' domestic visits, Points of order (04:07:91) 461
Steel industry (04:07:91) 476-9
Questions
Fishing crews, Housing finance 237w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 31
Manchester Airport (10:07:91) 1060-2

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Questions
Iron & steel industry, Scotland 314

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Points of order (02:07:91) 179
Oral question time intervention (08:07:91) 634
Power industry (02:07:91) 235, 254, 256, 260-3
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 275, 283-4, 287
Questions
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 423w
Fossil fuel levy 39w
Hospitals, South Glamorgan Health Authority 631-2
Ministers' visits abroad, USA 313w
Non-fossil fuel obligation, Nuclear power 37w
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff, Operating theatres 507-8w
Sizewell B, Nuclear levy 38w
USA, Ministers' visits abroad 508w
Welsh Development Agency, Development Board for Rural Wales 31w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 495-7
Questions
Antarctic, HMS Endurance 354w
Birds, Pest control 466-8w
Boundary commissions, Local government constituencies 220w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Peat bogs, Sites of special scientific interest 222w
RAMSAR Convention, Thorne moors 417w
Wild geese, Pest control 342-3w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 669
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 677-8, 681
Questions
Dental services, Anaesthetics 409w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Education & Science 153w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Employment 154-5w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Health 226-8w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Social Security 151w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of the Environment 183w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Trade & Industry 161w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Transport 140w
"Disability Manifesto", Home Office 149w
"Disability Manifesto", Northern Ireland Office 301-4w
"Disability Manifesto", Prime Minister 184w
"Disability Manifesto", Treasury 156-7w
"Disability Manifesto", Welsh Office 449-50w
Handicap benefits, Right of abode 66w
Mental health community care, Departmental circulars 120w
Mobility allowance, Right of abode 66w
Wheelchairs 409w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 54, 80-2

Morris, Mr Michael
Questions
Drugs 357-8w

Morrison, Sir Charles
Debates etc.
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 550, 552-4, 561

Mortgage defaulters
Northern Ireland 475w
Repossession orders 475w

Mortgages
Income support 328w
Social security benefits 329w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 229, 247-50
Questions
Prisons, Sports facilities 425-6

Motor industry
Exports 302-3

Motor vehicle theft
Police national computer 105w

Motor vehicles
Energy conservation 16w

Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) (No 2) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(02:07:91) 182

Motorcycles
Driving instruction 15w

Motorway service areas
M40 309w

Motorways
Environmental impact assessment 139w, 421w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 670
Deafness, Diagnosis (11:07:91) 1207-10, 1212
Questions
Audit, Fraud 430w
CCL Assurance, Bank of Credit & Commerce International 522w
CCL Assurance, Company investigations 522w
ICI, Takeovers 299-300
Personal pensions 461-2w

Moynihan, Mr Colin, Under-Secretary of State for Energy
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 263-6
Questions
Alternative energy, Exhibitions 423-4w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 417w
Petroleum exploration licences 424w
Petroleum exploration licences, Continental shelf 422w
Piper Alpha Inquiry, Costs 152w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Wave power 37w

Mozambique
Food aid 499w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Questions
Cambodia 646
Guildford Four Inquiry 209w
Maguire Seven, Judgments 87w
McGhee, Charles, Prisoners' transfers 435w
National Rivers Authority 378w
UN Secretariat, Official visits 238w

Multifibre arrangement
Redundancy 20w

Multiple launch rocket system
(01:07:91) 43-119

Murphy, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1167-9
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 270-1, 276-9, 281, 288
Questions
Conwy tunnel 146w
Conwy tunnel, Contracts 145w
ICI 636

Museums & galleries
Fees & charges 5w

Music
Greater London 14

Mutual recognition of qualifications
Immigrant doctors 119w

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Nadin, Peter
Death 354-5w

Nairn
Pedestrian crossings 469w

National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People
Public appointments 108-9w

National Assistance Act 1948
Questions
333-4w

National Association of Funeral Directors
307

National Audit Office
Manifestos 776

National Audit Office (Extension of Powers) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

National Audit Office (Extension of Powers) Bill 1990/91—continued
Questions
776

National Blood Transfusion Service
120w

National Consumer Council
316-7

National Curriculum Council
440w
Public appointments 406w

National Enterprise (Reconstruction) Board Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

National Finance
see Treasury

National Health Service Act 1977
Questions
333-4w

National Health Service & Community Care Act 1990
Questions
331w

National House Building Council
(05:07:91) 594-611

National insurance contributions
Tax yields 8-9w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Power
(02:07:91) 227-69

National Rivers Authority
278w, 378w, 381-2w, (12:07:91) 1215-36, 1247-86, 194 c1217-38, 1249-88

National Union of Civil & Public Servants
Pay settlements 425w

National Union of Mineworkers
Certification Officer 640-1
Intelligence services 24w

National vocational qualification
347w

Nationalisation
159w

NATO
(01:07:91) 43-119, 219w
Defence review 212w
Rapid deployment forces 149-50

Natural Environment Research Council
UK contributions 450w

Natural Resources Institute
369-70w

Naturalisation
Administrative delays 429-30

Nature Conservancy Council
317-8w, 422w, 466-7w

Nature conservation
(05:07:91) 548-65
Badgers (05:07:91) 566-93
Dredging 76w
Offshore drilling 317-8w
Overseas aid 259w

Naval bases
134w
Rosyth dockyard 133w

Navy
Armed forces women 158
Defence review 212w
Shipbuilding 158

Neath
261w
Disabled workers 772-3

Nederlandsche Credietverzekering Maatschappij
20-1w

Needham, Mr Richard, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1024-6, 1051-8
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 1073-4
Chemical industries, Hazardous wastes 234w
Chemical industries, Northern Ireland 1078
Du Pont, Hazardous wastes 25-6w, 231-4w
Energy consumption, Northern Ireland Office 27-8w
Factories, Environmental audit 284w
Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, House of Commons debates 479w
Hazardous wastes, Northern Ireland 26w
Historic buildings, Northern Ireland 286w
Incinerators, Maydown 500w
Incinerators, Northern Ireland 26w
Incinerators, Pollution control 284w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 475w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Privatisation 477w
Northern Ireland Railways, Terrorism 476w
Owner occupied housing, Northern Ireland 477w
Ports, Rathlin Island 26-7w
Public appointments, Strangford Lough 286w
Public footpaths, Northern Ireland 25w
Shipbuilding, Manpower 479w
Spirits, Metrication 1077
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 1074, 1079

Neighbourhood watch schemes
433

Nellist, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Le Pen, Jean-Marie, Points of order (02:07:91) 180-2
Members' imprisonment, Points of order (12:07:91) 1216
Questions
Business statements 1095-6
Immigration 249w
Magistrates' courts, Rate arrears 149-50w
Punjab, Human rights 163-4w
Trades Union Congress, Educational finance 68-9w
Youth training, Training allowances 160-1

Nelson, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 668-9
European Council (01:07:91) 29

Networker trains
Kent 17w

Neubert, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 456
Housing (02:07:91) 192
Questions
Litter, Local government functions 384w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Foreign investment in UK 309

New businesses
Enterprise allowance scheme 347w

New Parliamentary building
House of Commons accommodation 338w

Newcastle upon Tyne
Property development 277w
Social security benefits reductions 399w

Newhaven-Dieppe ferry
Industrial disputes 291w

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Secretary of State for Social Security
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 784, 806, 808
Questions
Pensions Ombudsman 152w

Newtownards
Flags 497w

Next of kin
Tax administration 526w

Next steps initiative
17-8, 130w, 144w, 409w

NHS
Accounting 411-2w
Building repairs 500-4w
Consultants 333w
Nottinghamshire 118w
Research finance 333-4w
Staffordshire 164-5w
Wales 632-3

NHS administration
Manpower 337w, 374w
Scotland 270w, 374w
Wales 146w

NHS charges
46w

NHS complaints
334w
Hospital admissions (05:07:91) 622-8

NHS finance
Scotland 195-6w

NHS internal market
505w, 632-3

NHS Management Executive
336w

NHS pensions
Retail price index 67w
Scotland 67w

NHS review
280w

NHS trusts
330w, 408w
Disclosure of information 332-3w
Information 330w
Manpower 188w
Northern Ireland 477w
Wales 640

Nicaragua
Bilateral aid 260w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 227-8
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 659
Questions
Council of Ministers 22-3w
Dock labour scheme 769

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1105, 1111
Housing (02:07:91) 214-5
Questions
Defence review 437-8
Family credit, Self-employed 196-7w
Industrial training 771
Ministry of Defence, Civil service dispersal 240w
Railway accidents, Bradford-on-Tone 84w
Sheep dipping, Chemicals 73w
Telecommunications industry 177w
Voluntary schools, Capital investment 177w
Waste management, Departmental publications 55w
Water supply industry, Income 524w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1246
Environment (12:07:91) 1262-6
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 373, 375
Questions
South West Water 939

Nitrates
Water pollution 524w

Nitrogen oxides
Air pollution control 91-2w

Noise control
938-9

Non-departmental public bodies
Environment protection 453w
Pollution control 278w

Non-domestic rates
142w, 949-50
Council tax 949

Non-fossil fuel obligation
38w
Finance 38w
Nuclear power 37w

Non-Fossil Fuel Purchasing Agency
38w

Non-statutory training organisations
295-6w

Norris, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 455
Housing (02:07:91) 188-9
Questions
Employment schemes, Hackney 293w
Estate Action, Hackney 314w
Inner cities initiative, Hackney 323w
Inner city partnerships, Hackney 274-5w
Teachers, Early retirement 243w

North Sea
Sea pollution 515-6w

North Staffordshire Health Authority
164-5w

North West Arts
15

North West region
Arts Council grants 15
Inward 355-6w

North West Water Group
944-5
Directors 945
Pollution control 945

North Wiltshire District Council
489w

North York Moors National Park
Farms 186w

North Yorkshire County Council Bill (HL) 1989/90
Debates etc.
Rep* (02:07:91) 147
3R* (09:07:91) 759

Northern Ireland
Action for community employment 1073-4
Appropriations in aid (10:07:91) 971-1058
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 285w
Chemical industries 1078
Civil service agencies 144w
Community relations 1075-7
Employment discrimination 479w
Environmental audit 284w
Hazardous wastes 26w, 234w
Heart diseases 284-5w
Historic buildings 286w
HMSO 478w
Hospital closures 376w
Incinerators 26w, 284w
Islands 125w
Kidney machines 1077-8

Northern Ireland—continued
Legislation 1071
Ministerial statements (03:07:91) 319-27
Mortgage defaulters 475w
NHS trusts 477w
Owner occupied housing 477w
Police national computer 144w
Prisoners' transfers 215w
Public footpaths 25w
Public order offences 125w
Publishing 478w
Railway transport 144-5w
Retirement pensions 125w
Rights of accused 248w
Rural areas 231w
Shipbuilding 479w
Sports 1074-5
Student grants 235w
Terrorism 477-8w, 1071-3
Transplant surgery 1078
Unemployment 1074, 1079

Northern Ireland Curriculum Council
Publishing 301w

Northern Ireland Dept of Agriculture
231w

Northern Ireland Electricity
Privatisation 477w

Northern Ireland government
475-6w, 1069-71
Conservative Party 477w
Political parties 376w, 1069

Northern Ireland health & social services boards
Finance 479w

Northern Ireland Office
"Disability Manifesto" 301-4w
Energy consumption 27-8w
Publicity 145w
Telephones 500w

Northern Ireland Railways
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 144-5w
Terrorism 476w

Northern Ireland Rural Development Council
231w

Northern region
Economic recession 302
Resettlement units 460w

Northern Regional Health Authority
Relocation of employees 411w

Northolt
Fire services 208w

Northumberland
Derelict land 937-8
Family doctors 164w

Norway
Fisheries 471-2w, 519w

Notices to quit
Watney Truman 311w
Whitbread 19w

Nottingham
City Challenge 934

Nottingham University
437w

Nottinghamshire
NHS 118w

Nuclear Electric
38w
Advertising 422w
Pay 422-3w

Nuclear levy
Sizewell B 38w

Nuclear physics
Daresbury 39-40w, 178w, 223-4w, 439w
Public sector assets 40w

Nuclear physics—continued
Science & Engineering Research Council 40w

Nuclear power
Non-fossil fuel obligation 37w

Nuclear powered vessels
Emergency planning 241w
International cooperation 241w
Ports 241w

Nuclear reactors
Water treatment 525w

Nuclear safeguards
244w
International Atomic Energy Agency 245w
Nuclear weapons 487w
Radioactive wastes 422w

Nuclear safety
Civil service manpower 348w

Nuclear submarines
213-4w, 518w
Defence procurement 213w
Telecommunications technology 492w

Nuclear weapons
Iraq 150, 252w, 775
Nuclear safeguards 487w
USSR 134w

Nuclear weapons policy
Military balance 211w

Nuclear weapons tests
Exservicemen 6w

Nursery schools
London boroughs 241w

Nurses
Occupational health 154w, 329-30w
Professional qualifications 455-6w
Recruitment 456w

Nurses' training
455-6w
Professional qualifications 46-7w
Unemployment 46-7w

Nursing homes
Health services 263w
Wales 263w

Oakham
Police stations 106w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 786
Questions
Armed forces casualties 158-9
Local government services, Contracts for services 940
Urban development corporations, Housing finance 180w, 228w
Urban development corporations, Housing stock 180-1w, 228w
Urban development corporations, Tourism 180w
Urban development corporations, Training 179-80w, 228w

Obscenity
Import controls 425w

Occupational health
298w, 328w, 370w
Nurses 154w, 329-30w

Occupational therapy
188w

Odour pollution
Sewage 220w

Office equipment
Repairs & maintenance 429-30w

Office of Population Censuses & Surveys
377-8w
Disclosure of information 334w

Office of Telecommunications
19w, 322-4w

Official engagements
110w, 183w, 453w

Official meetings
Local authorities 275w

Official publications
Local Government Boundary Commission for England 221w

Official visits
UN Secretariat 238w
Venezuela 414w

Offshore drilling
Nature conservation 317-8w

Old people's homes
Tower Hamlets 330w

Older workers
Employment Action 766-7

Olympic Games
Greater Manchester (04:07:91) 537-44

One parent families
Standard spending assessments 273w
Statistics 219w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Questions
Air force bases, Civil servants 487w
Armed forces, Racial harassment 485w
Armed forces discharges, Training 484w, 488w
Armed forces discharges, Vocational guidance 484w
Army 485w
Army, Armed forces recruitment 212w, 485w
CFE Treaty, Arms control 483w
Defence Arms Control Unit 242w
Defence land, Land acquisition 487w
Defence land, Planning permission 489w
Defence review 212-3w
Defence review, Air force 484w
Defence review, Defence expenditure 212w
Defence review, Navy 212w
Frigates, Shipbuilding 214w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Armed forces casualties 484w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Mental illness 143-4w
Minesweepers, Shipbuilding 214w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service redundancies 483w
Nuclear submarines 213-4w
Nuclear submarines, Defence procurement 213w
Nuclear weapons, Nuclear safeguards 487w
RAF Hullavington 489w
Shipbuilding, USSR 213w
USSR, CFE Treaty 419w
Warships, Amphibious vehicles 214w

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 26-7
Questions
Business statements 1087

Opera houses
13
Greater London 12-3

Operating theatres
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff 507-8w

Opinion polls
Attorney General 424w
Dept of Education & Science 438w
Dept of Employment 464-5w
Dept of Energy 424w
Dept of Health 457w
Dept of Social Security 461w
Dept of the Environment 416w
Dept of Trade & Industry 523w
Dept of Transport 421w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 419w
Home Office 435w

Opinion polls—continued
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 441w
Ministry of Defence 489w
Scottish Office 473w
Treasury 526w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 672
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1114-5
Power industry (02:07:91) 234, 256-9
Steel industry (04:07:91) 467-8
Questions
Local government staff, Manpower 380w

Opposition days
Electricity supply industry (02:07:91) 227-69
Gas supply industry (02:07:91) 227-69
Housing (02:07:91) 187-226
Low incomes (09:07:91) 784-834

Oral questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:07:91) 160, (04:07:91) 422, (08:07:91) 648, (10:07:91) 771, 774, (11:07:91) 1081, 1084

Orange badge scheme
(08:07:91) 675-708

Orchestras
Arts finance 88w

Orders & regulations
Handicap benefits 199-200w
Local government finance 377w

Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development
435

Overseas aid
Bangladesh 22w, 260-1w
Construction 368w
Developing countries 260w
Eastern Europe 516w
Environment protection 427w
Forest protection 452w
Horn of Africa 259w
Iraq 428w
Kurdistan 370-2w
Nature conservation 259w
South Africa 646-7
Sri Lanka 325-6w
Zimbabwe 644

Overseas status report service
Administrative costs 253-4w

Overseas trade
Czechoslovakia 21w

Owner occupied housing
Northern Ireland 477w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 233
Questions
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 954-5

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 787
Questions
Countryside stewardship scheme 946
Industrial training 772
Special education, Local government expenditure 304-8w
Television licences, Computer privacy 321w

Paisley
Housing finance 167w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 972, 974, 977, 982, 984-5, 988, 990, 992-1000

Paisley, Rev Ian—continued
Calling of Members, Points of order (03:07:91) 336
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 322, 327
Questions
Business statements 443
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 1071-2

Pakistan
Immigration applications 163w

Palace of Westminster
211w
Energy conservation 338-9w
Procurement 274w
Recycling 338-9w

Parachute Regiment
490w

Parental responsibility
Young offenders 423

Parish councils
Election expenses 413w

Parish Councils (Access to Information) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Parking attendants
(08:07:91) 675-708

Parkside Health Authority
(05:07:91) 622-8

Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology
281w

Parliamentary Works Office
211w
Recruitment 337w

Parliamentary constituencies
Boundary Commission for England 106-7w

Parliamentary privilege
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:07:91) 783

Parliamentary questions
253w

Parrots
Import of live animals 371-2w

Parry, Mr Robert
Questions
Bentley, Derek, Miscarriages of justice 321w

Pascall, David
406w

Passport Agency
see United Kingdom Passport Agency

Passports
Administrative delays 105w

Patchett, Mr Terry
Questions
Economic growth 435

Patent Office Trading Fund Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Patents
Drugs 19w, 45w, 98w

Patnick, Mr Irvine, Lord Commissioner to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 468

Patten, Rt Hon John, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Bentley, Derek 215-6w
Bentley, Derek, Miscarriages of justice 321w

Patten, Rt Hon John—continued
Civil defence, Wyre Forest 249w
Cleeland, Paul, Sentencing 434-6w
Crime prevention, Public participation 433
Crime prevention panels, Young offenders 206w, 433w
Crime victims, Women 208-9w
Criminal injuries compensation 510-1w
Drug crimes, Crime prevention 210w
Emergency planning, Local authorities 247w
Emergency planning, London boroughs 320-1w
False imprisonment, Compensation 4w, 101w
Fire regulations, Building Regulations Advisory Committee 147-8w
Fire services, Greater London 430-4w
Fire services, Northolt 208w
Identity cards 207w
Juries 247w
Magistrates' courts, Rate arrears 149-50w
Opinion polls, Home Office 435w
Squatting 429
Squatting, Shops 428
Uniform business rate, Non-payment 206w
Young offenders 423
Young offenders, Parental responsibility 423
Young offenders, Secure accommodation 423-4

Pawsey, Mr James
Questions
Civil service agencies, Northern Ireland 144w
Educational assessment 241-2w
Educational policy 435
Employment level, Rugby 350w
Examination boards, Ministerial powers 243w
Languages education, Curriculum 440w
Northern Ireland Railways, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 144-5w
School year 241w, 304w
School year, General certificate of secondary education 241w, 243w
Soft drinks, Manpower 324w
Soft drinks, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 323w
Soft drinks, Tax yields 525w
Truancy 440-1w

Pay
Coal mining 244w
Directors 159, 422-3w, 773, 1080
Electricity supply industry 86w
Nuclear Electric 422-3w
RAF St Athan 152
University teachers 437w
Wales 192w
Water companies 434

Pay incentives
Civil service agencies 298w, 459w
Customs & Excise 298w
Information Technology Services Agency 459w

Pay settlements
Employment level 350w
National Union of Civil & Public Servants 425w

PAYE
Tax yields 8-9w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 198, 205
Kirklees Borough Council, Public petitions (03:07:91) 413
Questions
Abortion, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 52-3w

Peat bogs
Sites of special scientific interest 222w

Pedestrian crossings
Nairn 469w

Pedestrians
Road accidents 5

Pembrokeshire Health Authority
640

Penalty fares
(09:07:91) 835-71

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
Community care, Finance 457w
Foundation for Sport & the Arts, Football pools 527-8w

Pension funds
Accounting 324w
Tax allowances 365w

Pensioners
Community charge 413w

Pensions Ombudsman
152w

Pentachlorophenol
Pollution monitoring 57-8w

Persian Gulf
Coral 934-5
Environment protection 934-5

Personal income
63w
Taxpayers 5-9w

Personal pensions
461-2w

Personal records
Disclosure of information (08:07:91) 708

Pest control
Birds 466-8w
Wild geese 342-3w

Pesticides
Fish 515w
Licensing 252w

Pet Animals (Amendment) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R (05:07:91) 618

Petroleum exploration licences
424w
Continental shelf 422w

Pets
Animal welfare (05:07:91) 618

Philippines
Disaster relief 122w
Thomas Cook 123-4w

Physical education
445w
Wales 146w

PIEDA
463-4w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 657
Questions
Bus services, Surveys 15w
Horn of Africa, Overseas aid 259w
Regional aid 309

Pink, Graham
767-8

Piper Alpha Inquiry
Costs 152w

Piracy
Merchant ships 83w

Planning & Compensation Bill (HL) 1990/91
Questions
Commencement orders 278-9w

Planning appeals
Wales 34-6w

Planning authorities
Boxer system 400-1w

Planning Inspectorate
Conflict of interests 415w
Recruitment 384-5w

Planning permission
414w
Administrative delays 414w
Amusement arcades (01:07:91) 140-6
Defence land 489w
Fees & charges 277w
Satellite broadcasting 385-6w
South Park School Lincoln 94w

Plansworth Resettlement Unit
460w

Play groups
Fees & charges 475w
Scotland 475w

Playing fields
Schools 147w, 388w
Wales 388w

Plutonium
Czechoslovakia 244w
Exports 244w

Plymouth
Empty property 79w

Poetry
"Aquarius" 16

Points of order
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:07:91) 54, (02:07:91) 181-2, 186, 192, (03:07:91) 318, 336-7, (04:07:91) 499, (08:07:91) 674, (09:07:91) 790, 920, (10:07:91) 963-5, 976

Poland
Ministerial policy advisors 416w

Police
430-3
Basildon 432
Crime victims 208w
EC countries 219w
Manpower 430
West Yorkshire 206w

Police Authority for Northern Ireland
1071-2

Police custody
Time limits 150w

Police Federation of England & Wales
208w

Police national computer
103w
Data networks 102w
Disclosure of information 103-5w
Missing persons 102w
Motor vehicle theft 105w
Northern Ireland 144w
Police records 104w

Police records
102-3w
Police national computer 104w

Police stations
Oakham 106w

Police vehicles
Lighting 322w

Political activities
Local government staff 94w

Political parties
Northern Ireland government 376w, 1069

Political prisoners
China 419w

Political refugees
210w
Ministerial statements (02:07:91) 165-78

Pollution control

Pollution control*—*continued
Farms 340-1w
Incinerators 284w
Mersey Basin 944-5
Non-departmental public bodies 278w
North West Water Group 945

Pollution Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Pollution

Pollution monitoring
Dioxins 73w
Pentachlorophenol 57-8w
Trawsfynydd power station 448w

Polychlorinated biphenyl
Industrial wastes 56w
Rossendale 56w

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons
Medical research 165-6w

Pontypool
Dioxins 263-4w

Pontypool-Newport railway line
Investment 16w

Pontypridd
636

Population
Standard spending assessments 378w

Port Glasgow
Unemployment 472w

Porter, Mr David
Questions
Government grants to local authorities 55-6w
Mentally handicapped, Finance 52w
Mentally handicapped, Government grants to local authorities 95w
Mentally handicapped, Handicapped children 51-2w
Mentally handicapped, Revenue support grant 56w
New businesses, Enterprise allowance scheme 347w
Sunday trading 106w
Sunday trading, Law enforcement 150w

Portillo, Mr Michael, Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities
Questions
Area protection grant 58-64w
Bailiffs, Fees & charges 179w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Local authorities 948
City Challenge 384w
City Challenge, Finance 384w
Community charge, Debt collection 377w
Community charge, Liverpool 936
Community charge, Non-payment 936
Community charge, Tax collection 273-4w, 936-7
Community charge, Waltham Forest 935-6
Community charge capping 942
Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991 413w
Concert halls, Manchester 220w
Council tax, Non-domestic rates 949
Council tax, Public opinion 947-8
Council tax, Rate limitation 948-9
Council tax, Tax burden 523w
Homelessness 943
Local government finance 95w, 314w
Local government services, Competition 380-1w
Local government staff, Political activities 94w
Non-domestic rates 949-50
Sheffield Development Corporation, Employment opportunities 221w
Standard spending assessments 379w
Standard spending assessments, District councils 414w
Standard spending assessments, Population 378w

Porton International

Porton International*—*continued
Research finance 458w

Ports
Nuclear powered vessels 241w
Rathlin Island 26-7w

Portugal
Foreign trade 96w

Post Office
161w

Povey, Sean
(01:07:91) 43-119, 81w, 400w

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 397-401

Powell, Mr William
Debates etc.
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 332
Questions
EC Labour & Social Affairs Council 203-5w
Northern Ireland government 476w

Power station closures
193w

PowerGen
(02:07:91) 227-69

Powers of entry
Land (03:07:91) 338, (05:07:91) 621

Pregnant women
AIDS 507w
Employment protection 294w
HIV infection 129-30w, 507w

Pre-School Playgroups' Association
Clwyd 311w
Wales 311-2w

Prescott, Mr John
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1102, 1110, 1112, 1114-28, 1165, 1180, 1183-4, 1187-8
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1203
Oral question time intervention (01:07:91) 5
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 7
Channel tunnel, Rolling stock 173-4w
Railway freight transport, Speedlink 3-4

Prescriptions
Ativan 189w
Dietary foods 119-20w

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989
Questions
Rights of accused 248w

Price, Sir David
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 68
Questions
Community care, Elderly 117-8w
Hospital discharges 406w
Mental health community care, Departmental circulars 117w
NHS, Consultants 333w
NHS, Research finance 333-4w
NHS review 280w
NHS trusts 408w
NHS trusts, Disclosure of information 332-3w
NHS trusts, Information 330w
Residential care, Elderly 51w
Social security benefits, Mortgages 329w

Price increases
100w

Prices
Compact discs 300

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Debates etc.
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 281-3, 287
Questions
Training, EC grants & loans 350w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—continued
Urban development corporations 181w

Primary purpose rule
Immigration applications 424-5

Prime Minister
"Disability Manifesto" 184w

Prime Minister's questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:07:91) 774

Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff
631-2
Operating theatres 507-8w

Priority routes
Leyton 16w

Prison escapes
Belfast Prison 511-2w
Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 649-59, 774-5
Ministerial statements (08:07:91) 649-59

Prison population
432

Prison staff
425-6
Industrial disputes 512w
Industrial relations 512-3w

Prisoners
Drugs 148w
Women 215w

Prisoners' transfers
McGhee, Charles 435w
Northern Ireland 215w
Treaties 435w

Prisons
Sports facilities 425-6

Private notice questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:07:91) 180, (10:07:91) 952, 963

Privatisation
British Coal Corporation 162-3
British Rail 11w, 12
Electricity supply industry 423w
Export Credits Guarantee Department 20-1w
Fife Scottish Omnibuses 345w
Northern Ireland Electricity 477w
Property Services Agency 193-4, 950-5
Skillcentres 69-71w

Proceeds of crime
Accountants 160w

Procurement
Palace of Westminster 274w

Procurement Executive
240w

Product development
Defence industries 325w

Product safety
316-7

Professional organisations
Audit 17w, 254w, 521w

Professional qualifications
Nurses 455-6w
Nurses' training 46-7w

Project 2000
455-6w
Student grants 165w

Property development
Newcastle upon Tyne 277w

Property Services Agency
Privatisation 193-4, 950-5

Property transfer
RAE Bedford 77w

Prosecutions
Insolvency Service 255w
River pollution 473w

Prosecutions—continued
Steroid drugs 335w

Prosthetics
407w

Psittacosis
217w, 332w

Psychiatric nurses
Somerset 331w

Public appointments
Advisory Committee on Advertising 357-8w
Boundary Commission for England 107w
Housing for Wales 447w
Judiciary 68w
Local Government Boundary Commission for England 318-9w
Local Government Commission 318w
Medical services committees 118-9w
National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People 108-9w
National Curriculum Council 406w
Scottish Office 265-9w
Strangford Lough 286w
Training & enterprise councils 447-8w

Public contracts
312-3
EC countries 312
Republic of Ireland 312

Public expenditure
162, 175w, 257w, 358w
Advisory Board for the Research Councils 405w

Public footpaths
Northern Ireland 25w
Swansea 508w

Public Health Laboratory Service
458w

Public houses
Brewing industry 19w, 311w

Public lavatories
629

Public opinion
Council tax 947-8

Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987
Questions
125w

Public order offences
Northern Ireland 125w

Public participation
Crime prevention 433

Public petitions
Airguns (05:07:91) 545
Bows & arrows (05:07:91) 545
Castleford Normanton & District Hospital (10:07:91) 1059
Horses (05:07:91) 546, (12:07:91) 1215
Kirklees Borough Council (03:07:91) 413
Royal Welch Fusiliers (08:07:91) 733
Townmead School West Drayton (05:07:91) 547

Public Record Office
9w

Public records
9w
Disclosure of information 9w

Public relations
Civil service manpower 19-20

Public sector assets
Nuclear physics 40w

Public sector housing
940-1
Housing construction 379w

Public Service Contract Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Public service obligation grant
(04:07:91) 458, (11:07:91) 1102-206

Public service pensions
Re-employment 425-6w

Public transport
Energy conservation 290w

Publicity
Civil service agencies 459w
Dept of Education & Science 43-4w, 405-6w, 438-9w
Dept of Employment 72w, 390w, 465w
Dept of Energy 39w, 423-4w
Dept of Health 54w, 412w, 457w
Dept of Social Security 66w, 459-61w
Dept of the Environment 182w
Dept of Trade & Industry 20w, 523w
Dept of Transport 86w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 24w, 419-20w
Home Office 4w, 391-2w, 436w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 75w, 373w, 443w
Ministry of Defence 82w, 401w, 489-91w
Northern Ireland Office 145w
Scottish Office 131w, 515w
Welsh Office 35-6w, 388w, 447w

Publishing
Northern Ireland 478w
Northern Ireland Curriculum Council 301w

Punjab
Human rights 163-4w

Quin, Ms Joyce
Debates etc.
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Points of order (02:07:91) 179
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 2-3
Foreign trade, EC countries 96w
Foreign trade, Portugal 96w

Quinlivan, Noonan
(08:07:91) 649-59

Race Relations Act 1976
Questions
106w

Racial attacks
148-9w
Scotland 170w

Racial discrimination
200-1w
Legal aid 87w

Racial harassment
Armed forces 132-3w, 485w
Bradford 149w
Leeds 149w

Racial incitement
British National Party 173w

Radiation hazards
Trawsfynydd power station 192-4w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 37-8

Radioactive waste disposal
950

Radioactive wastes
Nuclear safeguards 422w

RAE Bedford
Property transfer 77w

RAF Bentwaters
487w

RAF Hullavington
489w

RAF Leeming
Low flying 399w
Tornado aircraft 399w

RAF Northolt
Air transport 84w

RAF Regiment
490w

RAF St Athan
Pay 152

RAF Wethersfield
Ministry of Defence police 517w

RAF Woodbridge
487w

Raffan, Mr Keith
Questions
Further education, Deaf 630
Minimum wage, Wales 637

Railway accidents
Bradford-on-Tone 84w

Railway electrification
Investment 10w
West Yorkshire 11-2

Railway freight transport
289w
Channel tunnel 2-3, 9-10, 10w, 11
Cornwall 4
EC countries 3
Speedlink 3-4

Railway network
Channel tunnel 7-8, 10w, 11, 236w
South London 236w

Railway Re-openings (Tribunal) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Railway stations
Crimes of violence 422w
Railway workers 421-2w

Railway transport
Expenditure 11w
Northern Ireland 144-5w

Railway workers
Railway stations 421-2w

Rain forests
Forest protection 326w, 452w

Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 177

RAMSAR Convention
Thorne moors 417w

Rapid deployment forces
Defence review 150
NATO 149-50

Rate arrears
315w
Magistrates' courts 149-50w
Tower Hamlets 383w

Rate limitation
Council tax 948-9

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Questions
EC Energy Council 423w

Rathlin Island
Ferries 26-7w
Ports 26-7w

Ravenscraig steelworks
(04:07:91) 460-536

Ray, John
(01:07:91) 43-119, 81w, 400w

Reading University
520w

Rear seat belts
14w

RECHAR
308

Recruitment
Nurses 456w
Parliamentary Works Office 337w
Planning Inspectorate 384-5w

Recycling
Domestic wastes 96w
EC countries 382-3w
Palace of Westminster 338-9w

Red Arrows
Whitby 400w

Redmond, Mr Martin
Questions
Air force bases 480-2w
Armed forces, Capital punishment 399-400w
Bomb disposal, Technical assistance 142-3w
Douglas-Home, William, Courts martial 142w
Emergency planning, Local authorities 247w
English National Opera, Arts finance 176w
International Maritime Bureau 83w
Legal aid, Racial discrimination 87w
Nurses' training, Professional qualifications 46-7w
Piracy, Merchant ships 83w
Public footpaths, Northern Ireland 25w
Race Relations Act 1976 106w
RAF Leeming, Low flying 399w
RAF Leeming, Tornado aircraft 399w
Red Arrows, Whitby 400w
Sickle cell disease 115-6w
Telephone systems 322w
Telephone systems, Identification of criminals 322-4w
Telephone systems, Video equipment 323w

Redundancy
Coal mining 265w
Defence industries 148-9, 518-9w
Footwear industry 109w
Multifibre arrangement 20w
Textile industry 109w

***Redwood, Mr John**, Minister of State for Industry*
Questions
Accountants, Proceeds of crime 160w
Association of British Insurers, Codes of practice 429w
Audit, Accountability 254w
Audit, Fraud 430w
Audit, Professional organisations 17w, 254w, 521w
Auditing Practices Board, Disclosure of information 18w
Banks, Small businesses 303-4
Brewing industry, Public houses 19w
CCL Assurance, Bank of Credit & Commerce International 522w
CCL Assurance, Company investigations 522w
Company accounts, Complaints 17w
Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies, Auditing Practices Board 324w
Ernst & Young, Dept of Trade inquiries 356w
Exports 313
Government assistance to nationalised industries, France 314
Grocery trade, Monopolies 177w
Housing construction, Warranties 522w
Insolvency Service, Accounting 255w
Insolvency Service, Crown prosecutors 256w
Insolvency Service, Prosecutions 255w
Insolvency Service, Yorkshire & Humberside 18w, 255-6w
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales, Company investigations 160w
Insurance, Investor protection 356w
Insurance Brokers' Registration Act 1977 356w
Iron & steel industry, Scotland 314
Leasing industrial equipment, Accounting 324w

***Redwood, Mr John**—continued*
Machine tools industry 304
Metrication, EC law 313-4
Office equipment, Repairs & maintenance 429-30w
Pension funds, Accounting 324w
Public contracts 312-3
Public contracts, EC countries 312
Soft drinks, Manpower 324w
Soft drinks, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 323w
Sound Diffusion, Dept of Trade inquiries 356w
Takeovers 158w
Telephone services, Compensation 19w
Telephone systems 322w
Telephone systems, Identification of criminals 322-4w
Telephone systems, Video equipment 323w
Unit Trust Association, Investment trusts 325w

Re-employment
Public service pensions 425-6w

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 324
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 653-4
Questions
Crime 430

Refreshment Dept
211w

Refrigerators
636

Refugees
Asia 157w
Employment training 463w
Estimates days (03:07:91) 343-413
Iraq 206w, 420w
Legal aid 433-4w
Turkey 153
Youth training 463w

Regional aid
309
Cornwall 311
Development areas 159w

Regional airports
9w

Regional arts boards
14-5
Arts finance 14

Regional development grants
Disclosure of information 344w
Scotland 344w

Regional health authorities
Finance 336w

Reid, Dr John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 59-71
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 672-3
Steel industry (04:07:91) 497, 499-500
Questions
Army 490-1w
Rapid deployment forces, Defence review 150

Relocation of employees
Ministry of Defence police 517w
Northern Regional Health Authority 411w

RENAVAL
Inverclyde 473w

Rent allowances
Local government expenditure 395w

Rent rebates
Local government expenditure 395w

***Renton, Rt Hon Tim**, Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Minister of State for the Arts)*

Renton, Rt Hon Tim*—*continued
Questions
Arts Council grants, North West region 15
Arts finance, Greater London 4-5w
Arts finance, Wales 5w
British Library, Construction 90w
Civil servants secondment, EC institutions 6w, 18
Civil service, Disabled workers 18-9
Civil service, Job satisfaction 5w
Civil service, Lie detectors 507w
Civil service agencies 17-8
Civil service agencies, Finance 420w
Civil service agencies, Social security benefits 18
English National Opera 13
English National Opera, Arts finance 176w
Members' Interests Select Committee, Select Committee evidence 17
Museums & galleries, Fees & charges 5w
Music, Greater London 14
Opera houses 13
Opera houses, Greater London 12-3
Orchestras, Arts finance 88w
Poetry, "Aquarius" 16
Public relations, Civil service manpower 19-20
Regional arts boards 14-5
Regional arts boards, Arts finance 14
Security vetting, Books 16-7
Theatre, Amateur arts 15

Rents to mortgages scheme
378w

Repairs & maintenance
Contracts 429-30w
Office equipment 429-30w
Tanks 281w

Repossession orders
Legal Aid Board 497w
Mortgage defaulters 475w

Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Variation of Specified Documents & Amendment) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Republic of Ireland
Public contracts 312
Students 164w

Research
Dioxins 72w
Ecology 450w

Research finance
Dental health 386w
NHS 333-4w
Porton International 458w

Resettlement Agency
397w, 459-60w

Resettlement units
Northern region 460w

Residential care
Elderly 51w
Hospital discharges 327-8w
Income support 217-8w, 246w
Local government social services 333-4w
Mentally ill 329w

Residential care of children
Local authorities 505-6w

Restoration of the Franchise Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (09:07:91) 777

Retail price index
NHS pensions 67w

Retirement age
389w

Retirement pensions
Northern Ireland 125w

Revenue support grant
Mentally handicapped 56w

Richardson, Ms Jo
Questions
Maternity services, Hospital beds 110-6w
Pregnant women, Employment protection 294w
Prisoners, Women 215w

Riddick, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 793
Members' attendance, Points of order (09:07:91) 779
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 658
Property Services Agency, Points of order (10:07:91) 965
Questions
Business statements 1088
Economic recession, Northern region 302
Employment level 349w
Housing association grant, West Yorkshire 141-2w
Housing associations, Expenditure 946-7
Nationalisation 159w
Northern Ireland government 475w
Trade unions 776-7

***Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm**, Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 1R (04:07:91) 458
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1102-14, 1121, 1123-7
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 2-3
Channel tunnel, Railway network 7-8
Channel tunnel, Rolling stock 173-4w
Chief Inspector of Transport Security, Annual reports 353w
Networker trains, Kent 17w
Opinion polls, Dept of Transport 421w
Railway freight transport, Cornwall 4
Railway freight transport, EC countries 3
Railway freight transport, Speedlink 3-4
Road traffic 11w
Roads, Expenditure 11w

Right of abode
Handicap benefits 66w
Mobility allowance 66w

Right to buy
Commonhold 414-5w

Rights of Access to Neighbouring Land Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
1R (03:07:91) 338
2R* & rem stages* (05:07:91) 621

Rights of accused
Northern Ireland 248w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 248w

River Clyde
River pollution 473w

River Lea
River pollution 382w

River Mersey
River pollution 944-5

River pollution
Prosecutions 473w
River Clyde 473w
River Lea 382w
River Mersey 944-5

River purification boards
Scotland 166-7w

River Safety Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 618

River Thames
Dredging 56-7w, 76w
Water transport 308w

RNAD Coulport
Construction 156-7

Road accidents
Children 5
Death 288-9w
EC countries 12-4w
M4 11w
Pedestrians 5
Road traffic control 309-10w
Speed limits 6

Road construction
A27 174w
Stockport bypass 286w
Weston-super-Mare 498w

Road safety
Cycling 5-6

Road signs
16w

Road traffic
11w

Road Traffic Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (08:07:91) 675-708

Road traffic control
Road accidents 309-10w

Road traffic offences
Statistics 287w

Road works
A5 264w
A44 191w
M62 174w
Maidstone bypass 421w

Roads
Expenditure 11w
Scotland 12w

***Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn**, Minister of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 279-81, 283
Questions
A5, Road works 264w
A44, Road works 191w
Average earnings, Wales 191w
Blue ear pig disease, Wales 190w
Braille, General certificate of secondary education 101w
Conwy tunnel 146w
Conwy tunnel, Contracts 145w
Cost per pupil, Secondary education 262w
Craft industries, Wales 31-2w
Employment Action, Wales 34w
Employment training, Special training needs 101w, 147w, 191w
Employment training, Wales 192w
Engineering education, Student numbers 264w
Further education, Deaf 630
ICI 636
Livestock, Waste disposal 147w, 190w
Pay, Wales 192w
Physical education 445w
Physical education, Wales 146w
Playing fields, Schools 147w, 388w
Pre-School Playgroups' Association, Clwyd 311w
Pre-School Playgroups' Association, Wales 311-2w
Public footpaths, Swansea 508w
Publicity, Welsh Office 35-6w
Royal Welch Fusiliers 34w
School buildings, Capital investment 386w
School meals, Wales 444-5w
Schools, Wales 388w
Special education, Wales 630
Special training needs, Wales 229-30w
Sports facilities, Schools 146w
Standard assessment tasks, Wales 33-4w
Teachers, Wales 29-32w, 388-9w
Tourism, Wales 629-30
Trading standards departments, Wales 31w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn—continued
Unemployment, Wales 32-3w
Wales Tourist Board, Advertising 629
Welsh Development Agency, Development Board for Rural Wales 31w
Welsh Office, Rural areas 27-8w
Ysgol Belmont 312w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 873
Steel industry (04:07:91) 502

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Questions
Manufacturing industries, West Midlands 305-6

Robinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1027-32
Calling of Members, Points of order (03:07:91) 337-8
Questions
Northern Ireland government 1070

Roe, Mrs Marion
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 34
Questions
Biotechnology, International conferences 416w
Hospital waiting lists 118w
Local government services, Liverpool 940
Pollution control, Non-departmental public bodies 278w
Women's employment, EC Social Charter 159

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 47, 53-5, 112-5
Questions
Arms trade, Iraq 149, 242w
Cardiff Bay barrage 635
Day release, Hobbies 43w
International Military Services 242w

Rolling stock
Channel tunnel 173-4w

Roll-on roll-off ships
84-5w, 291-2w
Shipping safety 175w

Romania
Antisemitism 354w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Questions
Consumer protection, EC internal trade 18-9w
Severe disability premium, Social security appeals 121w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 215-7

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Naval bases, Rosyth dockyard 133w

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 972, 984, 991, 995, 1000-10, 1015, 1050
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 911-2, 917
Political refugees (02:07:91) 174
Questions
Chemical industries, Hazardous wastes 234w
Chemical industries, Northern Ireland 1078
Dioxins, Milk 519w
Du Pont, Hazardous wastes 25-6w, 141w, 231-4w
Factories, Environmental audit 284w

Ross, Mr William—continued
"Further Education in Northern Ireland: The Road Ahead" 234w
Hazardous wastes, EC countries 92w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 141w, 444w
Hazardous wastes, Incinerators 413w
Hazardous wastes, Northern Ireland 26w
Hazardous wastes, Scotland 468w
HMS Endurance, Falkland Islands 151
Incinerators, Maydown 500w
Incinerators, Northern Ireland 26w
Incinerators, Pollution control 284w
Northern Ireland Curriculum Council, Publishing 301w
Student grants, Science & Engineering Research Council 303w
Terrorism, Compensation 230-2w

Rossendale
Polychlorinated biphenyl 56w

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1239
Environment (12:07:91) 1219, 1230, 1249-55, 1277, 1286-8

Rost, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 255

Rosyth dockyard
157-8
Naval bases 133w

Rotherham
Local government constituencies 524w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 38
Unemployment (03:07:91) 387-9
Questions
Business statements 1098
Local government social services 280w

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 361-4
Questions
Engineering education, Student numbers 264w
Unemployment, Wales 637

Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley
Security 128w

Royal College of Surgeons
(05:07:91) 620

Royal Engineers
142-3w

Royal Irish Rangers
Defence review 156

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
15

Royal Observer Corps
391-4w

Royal Opera House
12-3

Royal ordnance factories
Ministry of Defence police 143w

Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults
Mental health community care 120w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
144w, 375-6w, 1073

Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast
284-5w

Royal Welch Fusiliers
34w, 264w, 312w, 635, 776
Public petitions (08:07:91) 733

RU486
Clinical trials 225w
Licensing 280w

Ruddock, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 675-6, 684, 686, 688, 690-2, 695, 697-8, 702-3
Questions
Bus services, Handicapped 290w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 11
Cycleways, Greater London 289w
Haberdashers' Aske's School, City technology colleges 438w
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 338-9w
Public transport, Energy conservation 290w

Rugby
Employment level 350w

Rumbold, Rt Hon Angela, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 588-92
Questions
Belfast Prison, Prison escapes 511-2w
Boundary Commission for England, Parliamentary constituencies 106-7w
Boundary Commission for England, Public appointments 107w
Brixton Prison, Fresh start 513w
Chahal, Karamji Singh 432
Dogs 207w
Dogs, Tower Hamlets 390w
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 1-3w
Fresh start 514w
McGhee, Charles, Prisoners' transfers 435w
Prison population 432
Prison staff 425-6
Prison staff, Industrial disputes 512w
Prison staff, Industrial relations 512-3w
Prisoners, Drugs 148w
Prisoners, Women 215w
Prisoners' transfers, Northern Ireland 215w
Prisoners' transfers, Treaties 435w
Prisons, Sports facilities 425-6
Race Relations Act 1976 106w
Sunday trading 106w
Sunday trading, Law enforcement 150w

Rural areas
Government grants 634
Northern Ireland 231w
Wales 634-5
Welsh Office 27-8w

Rural Development Council for Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Rural Development Council

Safer cities scheme
433

Safety belts
Goods vehicles 308-9w

Safety measures
Armed forces training 81w, 239w
Dioxins 131w
Transport 84w

Safety standards
Ships 291w

Sainsbury, Mr Tim, Minister of State for Trade
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 430w
Companies, Billing 316
Coordinating Committee on Export Controls 305
European Free Trade Association, EC action 254w
Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 429w
Exports 158w
Exports, Egypt 99w
Footwear industry, East Midlands 315-6
Foreign investment in UK, Industrial research 301
Foreign investment in UK, USA 301

Sainsbury, Mr Tim—continued
Foreign trade, EC countries 96w
Foreign trade, Portugal 96w
General Motors 301
Industry 308
Inflation 307-8
Information technology, Balance of trade 159w
Manufactured exports 160-1w
Multifibre arrangement, Redundancy 20w
Overseas trade, Czechoslovakia 21w
Simplification of International Trade Procedures Board 21w
Textile industry, Government assistance 316
Textiles, China 305
Trade competitiveness 158w
UK trade with EC 305
Unfair competition, Egypt 254-5w

St Ives
Youth training 765

Salmon
Fish farming 272w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 977
Dalzell platemill, Points of order (02:07:91) 179-80
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 912, 917
Steel industry (04:07:91) 464-5, 482, 491-5, 498-9
Questions
British Steel Corporation, Dalzell 375w
British Steel Corporation, Scotland 375w
Channel Three, Broadcasting licences 206w
Fish conservation, Scotland 374-5w
Fisheries, Norway 471-2w
Ground water, Scotland 166w
Irrigation, Licensing 166w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, British Steel Corporation 309-10
River purification boards, Scotland 166-7w

Salmonella
Veterinary Investigation Service 74w

Sandwell Health Authority
121w

Satellite broadcasting
Planning permission 385-6w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 864-5
Political refugees (02:07:91) 173
Questions
Armed forces training, Armed forces casualties 76w
Army Act 1955, Inquiries 76w

Schedule E income tax
7w

Schengen Agreement
250w

School administration
42-4w
Budgeting 436-7w

School buildings
223w
Capital investment 386w
Wales 386w

School Examinations & Assessment Council
241-2w

School governors
British Nuclear Fuels 438w

School meals
Wales 444-5w

School milk
330w

School population
Tower Hamlets 242w

School year
241w, 304w
General certificate of secondary education 241w, 243w

Schools
Dental health 385w
Dental services 312w, 385-6w
Local government expenditure 236w
Manpower 42w
Playing fields 147w, 388w
Scotland 236w
Sports facilities 146w
Wales 147w, 388w

Schools & parents
Special education 403-4w

Science & Engineering Research Council
40-1w, 178w, 224w
Capital investment 436w
International cooperation 40-1w
Nuclear physics 40w
Student grants 303w

Science & technology research
Expenditure 41-2w

Scope of debate
(11:07:91) 1203
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:07:91) 274-5, (05:07:91) 555-6, 574, 583, 598, 600-1, 605, 608, (08:07:91) 704, 747, (09:07:91) 837, 862, 883, 887, (10:07:91) 971, (12:07:91) 1232

Scotland
Abortion 130w
AIDS 271w, 346w
Alcoholism 471w
Armed forces recruitment 133w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 195w
British Steel Corporation 375w
Clinical wastes 374w, 469-70w
Community care 342w
Complaints against police 68w
Council house sales 514w
Councillors 127w
Councillors' allowances 127w
Crofters' building grants & loans scheme 237w
Day care of children 473-4w
Defence land 80w
Employment training 473-4w
Environmentally sensitive areas 271-2w
Family doctors 270w
Fish conservation 374-5w
Fish farming 272w
Floods 172w
Government grants to local authorities 168-70w
Greenbelt 170w
Ground water 166w
Hazardous wastes 468w
HIV infection 129-30w
Homelessness 167-8w
Hospital closures 236-7w
House condition survey 346w
Housing construction 170w
Iron & steel industry 314
Judiciary 68w
Land ownership & tenure 343w
Licensing laws (02:07:91) 182
Local government expenditure 129w, 361-4w
Local government finance 129w, 171-2w
Local government revenue 375w
Local government services 127w
Low flying 133w
Mental illness specific grant 235-6w, 342w
NHS administration 270w, 374w
NHS finance 195-6w
NHS pensions 67w
Play groups 475w
Racial attacks 170w
Regional development grants 344w
River purification boards 166-7w
Roads 12w

Scotland—continued
Schools 236w
Senile dementia 470-2w
Set-aside schemes 474-5w
Sites of special scientific interest 344w, 475w
Training 272w, 345-6w
Unemployment 129w
Vocational guidance 343w, 347w, 374w

Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Attendance allowance, Fylde 398w
Attendance allowance, Terminal care 151w
"Disability Manifesto", Dept of Social Security 151w
Disability working allowance, Take-up 65w
Handicap benefits, Orders & regulations 199-200w
Handicap benefits, Right of abode 66w
Invalid care allowances, Take-up 65w
Mobility allowance, Right of abode 66w
Social Fund, Social security benefits reductions 399w

Scottish Enterprise
345w
Government grants 269-70w

Scottish Grand Committee
(02:07:91) 182, 183, (10:07:91) 1056

Scottish Homes
514w

Scottish Natural Heritage
Finance 344w

Scottish Office
Civil service agencies 130w
Ministerial duties 127w
Ministerial policy advisors 128w
Opinion polls 473w
Public appointments 265-9w
Publicity 131w, 515w
Telephones 271w

Screening
HIV infection 506-7w

Sea pollution
Algae 515-6w
North Sea 515-6w

Sea rescue
Contractorisation 136w

Secondary education
Cost per pupil 262w

Secure accommodation
Young offenders 423-4

Security
Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley 128w

Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry
Costs 478w

Security vetting
Books 16-7

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 667
Questions
Cambodia 645-6

Select Committee evidence
Members' Interests Select Committee 17

Self-determination of states
Yugoslavia 521w

Self-employed
Family credit 196-7w

Sellafield
422w, 950

Senile dementia
Greater London 407w
Scotland 470-2w

Sentencing
Cleeland, Paul 434-6w

SERC
see Science & Engineering Research Council

Serious Fraud Office
642-3
Annual reports 353w

Set-aside schemes
442w
Agricultural research 520w
Expenditure 441-2w
Inspections 442w
Scotland 474-5w
Take-up 475w
Wales 446w

Severe disability premium
Social security appeals 121w

Severn bridge
Accidents 140-1w, 420-1w
Debts 309w
Interest charges 309w

Severn Bridges Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Rep & 3R (02:07:91) 270-90

Sewage
Odour pollution 220w

Share shops
450w

Shareholders
3D 56w

Shaw, Mr David
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 170
Questions
Council housing 381w
Minimum wage 770
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 1069

Shaw, Sir Giles
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 456

Sheep dipping
162w
Chemicals 73w
Health hazards 73w, 519w

Sheep scab
162w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Belfast Prison, Prison escapes 511-2w
Complaints against police, Compensation 4w
Hepatitis, Vaccination 118w
Police 431
Prison staff 426
Racial attacks 149w

Sheffield
Training 347w

Sheffield Development Corporation
Employment opportunities 221w

Sheltered housing
Leasehold housing 93w

Shelton, Sir William
Debates etc.
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 652
Questions
Community charge, Tax collection 273-4w

Shephard, Mrs Gillian, Minister of State, Treasury
Debates etc.
Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill, 1R (04:07:91) 536
Questions
Annual reports, Customs & Excise 298-9w

Shephard, Mrs Gillian—continued
Civil service, London allowance 364-6w
Civil service manpower, Gwent 426-7w
Day care of children, Customs & Excise 298w
Environmental policy, Treasury 156w
Foundation for Sport & the Arts, Football pools 527-8w
Higher civil servants, Civil service manpower 257-8w
Obscenity, Import controls 425w
Opinion polls, Treasury 526w
Pay incentives, Customs & Excise 298w
Performance indicators, Customs & Excise 298w
Public records 9w
Public records, Disclosure of information 9w
Public service pensions, Re-employment 425-6w
Telephones, Treasury 257-8w
Treasury, Departmental records 300w
VAT, Income 176w
VAT, Tax collection 526w
Whisky, EC internal trade 366w
Whisky, Tax yields 366w
Working hours, Customs & Excise 257w

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 599
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 257-8w
Exports 158w
Police 430-1

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Community Charge (Disqualification for Non-Payment) Bill, 1R (02:07:91) 182
Horses, Public petitions (12:07:91) 1215
Political refugees (02:07:91) 173
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 654
Townmead School West Drayton, Public petitions (05:07:91) 547
Questions
Unfair competition, Egypt 254-5w
Young offenders, Secure accommodation 423-4

Shipbuilding
159w
Frigates 214w
HMS Endurance 282w
Manpower 479w
Minesweepers 214w
Navy 158
Northern Ireland 479w
USSR 213w
Warships 495w

Shipping
140w

Shipping accidents
9, 85w, 353w
Ferries 85w
MFV Antares 8
MFV Wilhelmina J 308w
Transport of radioactive materials 291w

Shipping safety
9
Ferries 84-6w
Inspections 291-2w
Roll-on roll-off ships 175w

Ships
Safety standards 291w

Shops
Squatting 428

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 663
European Council (01:07:91) 36
Political refugees (02:07:91) 176

Shore, Rt Hon Peter—continued
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 332
Questions
Bangladesh, Overseas aid 260-1w
Council house rents, Tower Hamlets 415w
Housing construction, Tower Hamlets 415w

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 786, 792, 795, 810, 812-3, 819-21
Political refugees (02:07:91) 172
Questions
Refugees, Employment training 463w
Training 462-4w
West Midlands Police, Inquiries 207w

Shotgun certificates
247w

Sickle cell disease
115-6w

Sillars, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Ministerial statements, Points of order (02:07:91) 181
Ministers' domestic visits, Points of order (04:07:91) 460-1
Steel industry (04:07:91) 481
Yugoslavia (03:07:91) 333-4
Questions
Business statements 443

Simplification of International Trade Procedures Board
21w

Sims, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 455
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 7-8
Health service staff, Community care 331w
Prosthetics 407w
Psychiatric nurses, Somerset 331w

Sites of special scientific interest
Peat bogs 222w
Scotland 344w, 475w

Sixth form education
Inverclyde 472w

Sizewell B
Nuclear levy 38w

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Questions
RAE Bedford, Property transfer 77w

Skillcentres
Employment training 70-1w
Lambeth 70w
Privatisation 69-71w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 674
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Points of order (09:07:91) 779
Business questions interventions (11:07:91) 1100
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1242-3
Environment (12:07:91) 1237
European Council (01:07:91) 34
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 920
Questions
Business statements 448, 1088-9
Contracts of employment 764
Dioxins, Milk 132w, 339-40w
Dioxins, Safety measures 131w
Economic & monetary union, Germany 311-2
Northern Ireland government 476w
Public sector housing, Housing construction 379w
Television licences 422

Slaughterhouses
EC law 131w

Sleeping rough
Census of population 334w

Slovenia
123w, 521w

Small businesses
Banks 299w, 303-4
Government assistance 216w
Truro 310-1

Small claims
642

Small Firms Service
348w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Questions
Medical education, University finance 437w
Student loans, Debts 43w
University teachers, Pay 437w
Veterinary medicine, Animal welfare 153w

Smith, Mr Chris
Questions
NHS trusts 330w
School buildings 223w

Smith, Sir Dudley
Debates etc.
Arms Control & Disarmament (Inspections) Bill (HL), 2R & rem stages (09:07:91) 879
Housing estates (10:07:91) 960
Questions
Drugs, Patents 45w

Smith, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 661-2

Smith, Mr John P
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 81
Questions
RAF St Athan, Pay 152
Royal Welch Fusiliers 776
Vale of Glamorgan railway 1-2

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Points of order (09:07:91) 780
Low incomes (09:07:91) 787
Questions
Aggregates 319-20w
EC Finance Council 367-8w
Government assistance to nationalised industries, France 314
"Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England & Wales" 58w
Insolvency Service, Accounting 255w
M40, Construction materials 175w
National vocational qualification 347w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 952
Unit Trust Association, Investment trusts 325w

Smoke detection
(05:07:91) 594-611

Smoke Detectors Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (05:07:91) 594-611

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1019-22, 1047
Calling of Members, Points of order (03:07:91) 338
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 895-6, 911
Questions
Business statements 1093-4
Immigration applications , Primary purpose rule 424
Transplant surgery, Northern Ireland 1078

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1102, 1133, 1138-9, 1142, 1146, 1152, 1161, 1173-81, 1184

Snape, Mr Peter—continued
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 840, 842, 846-50
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 275, 284-6
Questions
American Airlines, Conditions of employment 140w
Heart pacemakers 121w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Brixton Prison, Fresh start 513w
Business statements 442
Fresh start 514w
Prison staff, Industrial disputes 512w
Prison staff, Industrial relations 512-3w

Social Fund
Social security benefits reductions 399w

Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1986
Questions
65w

Social security appeals
65w
Severe disability premium 121w

Social security benefits
Civil service agencies 18
Mortgages 329w
Wales 199w

Social Security Benefits Agency
397w, 459-60w

Social security benefits disqualification
Family credit 397w

Social security benefits rates
Young people 67w

Social security benefits reductions
Hospital patients 122w
Newcastle upon Tyne 399w
Social Fund 399w

Social security benefits rules
Family credit 398-9w

Social security claims
Unemployment benefits 71w

Social Security Contributions Agency
397w, 459-60w

Social security payments
121w
Bank services 152w

Social workers' training
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education 497-8w

Soft drinks
Manpower 324w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 323w
Tax yields 525w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1238
Hospital admissions (05:07:91) 622-7
Housing (02:07:91) 195, 217-20
Housing estates (10:07:91) 958-9
Questions
City Challenge 384w
City Challenge, Finance 384w
Council housing, Homelessness 941
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 951-2

Somerset
Psychiatric nurses 331w

Sonar
Defence procurement 491-2w

Sound Diffusion
Dept of Trade inquiries 356w

South Africa
EC external relations 24-5w
Overseas aid 646-7

South Atlantic
Warships 282w

South Glamorgan Health Authority
632
Hospitals 631-2

South London
Ministers' domestic visits 450w
Railway network 236w
Youth unemployment 1082

South Park School Lincoln
126w
Planning permission 94w

South Wales
Unemployment 32-3w

South West region
Training & enterprise councils 349w

South West Water
939

Space technology
356-7w

Speaker and his deputies, For rulings & statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings & statements
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (02:07:91) 187, 227, (05:07:91) 548, 566, 575, 594, 612-3, (08:07:91) 675, 676, 677, 683, 687, 688, 690, 695, 697, 698, 699, 700, 702, 708, (09:07:91) 784, 895
Disallowed questions (04:07:91) 424
EC documents motions (01:07:91) 120
Orders & regulations motions (02:07:91) 290, (03:07:91) 339, (09:07:91) 777
Private Bills, 2R order read (04:07:91) 421
Private Members' Bills, 2R order read (05:07:91) 616-21
Procedure (02:07:91) 228, 234, (04:07:91) 454, 460, 468, 503 (08:07:91) 647, 731, (10:07:91) 953, 970

Speaker's rulings & statements
Business motions (08:07:91) 732, (09:07:91) 868
Business questions (04:07:91) 441, 446, 449
Calling of Members (01:07:91) 25, (02:07:91) 178, (03:07:91) 316, 325-7, 336-8, (04:07:91) 449, 451, 497, (10:07:91) 963
Committee stage (05:07:91) 620-1
Consolidated Fund debates (11:07:91) 1101
Documents (09:07:91) 781
House of Commons questions (10:07:91) 964
Members' conduct (11:07:91) 1125, (12:07:91) 1224, 1231
Members' dress (04:07:91) 458
Members' imprisonment (12:07:91) 1215-6
Members' interests (09:07:91) 917
Members' interventions (01:07:91) 47, 51, 120, (05:07:91) 614, (10:07:91) 1026, (11:07:91) 1101, 1103, 1130, (12:07:91) 1217, 1222
Members' speeches (01:07:91) 105, 120, (02:07:91) 192, 294, (03:07:91) 343, 352, (04:07:91) 465, (05:07:91) 594, (08:07:91) 694, (09:07:91) 784, 790, (10:07:91) 1029, (11:07:91) 1138, (12:07:91) 1230, 1266, 1286-8
Ministerial speeches (09:07:91) 801
Ministerial statements (01:07:91) 38, 42, (02:07:91) 170, 179-82, (03:07:91) 329, (04:07:91) 454, 455, (05:07:91) 567, (08:07:91) 668, (09:07:91) 779-80, (10:07:91) 964, (12:07:91) 1243
Ministers' domestic visits (04:07:91) 461, 466
Oral questions (02:07:91) 160, (04:07:91) 422, (08:07:91) 648, (10:07:91) 771, 774, (11:07:91) 1081, 1084
Parliamentary privilege (09:07:91) 783
Points of order (01:07:91) 54, (02:07:91) 181-2, 186, 192, (03:07:91) 318, 336-7, (04:07:91) 499, (08:07:91) 674, (09:07:91) 790, 920, (10:07:91) 963-5, 976
Prime Minister's questions (09:07:91) 774

Speaker's rulings & statements—continued
Private notice questions (02:07:91) 180, (10:07:91) 952, 963
Scope of debate (02:07:91) 274-5, (05:07:91) 555-6, 574, 583, 598, 600-1, 605, 608, (08:07:91) 704, 747, (09:07:91) 837, 862, 883, 887, (10:07:91) 971, (12:07:91) 1232
Supplementary questions (04:07:91) 443, (09:07:91) 771
Ten minutes rule (01:07:91) 43

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, Com (11:07:91) 1191-6, 1198
Environment (12:07:91) 1223-4, 1235
European Council (01:07:91) 37
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 900, 907
Questions
Car allowances 176w
Civil service, London allowance 364-6w
District health authorities, Greater London 189w
Economic & monetary union 162
Water transport, River Thames 308w

Special care baby units
110-6w, 188-9w

Special constables
431

Special Constables Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Special education
403w
Appeals 402-3w
Departmental circulars 404w
Local education authorities 402w
Local government expenditure 304-8w
Schools & parents 403-4w
Wales 630

Special training needs
216w
Employment training 101w, 108w, 147w, 155w, 191w, 202w
Training & enterprise councils 772-3
Wales 229-30w

Speed, Mr Keith
Questions
Maidstone bypass, Road works 421w

Speed governors
(08:07:91) 675-708
Lorries 174w, 287w

Speed limits
Road accidents 6

Speedlink
289w
Railway freight transport 3-4

Speller, Mr Tony
Questions
Federation of Catering Equipment Suppliers 18w
Palace of Westminster, Procurement 274w
Sheep dipping, Health hazards 519w
Training & enterprise councils, South West region 349w

Spicer, Sir Jim
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 103-5

Spirits
Metrication 1077

Sports
Northern Ireland 1074-5
VAT 1074-5

Sports facilities
Prisons 425-6
Schools 146w
Uniform business rate 524w
Wales 146w

Squatting
429
Shops 428

Squire, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Bypasses, Points of order (09:07:91) 779
Housing (02:07:91) 193
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 657
Questions
By elections, Militant tendency 436
Local government services, Contracts for services 940
Small businesses, Government assistance 216w

Sri Lanka
Human rights 325-6w
Overseas aid 325-6w

Staffordshire
NHS 164-5w

Stanbrook, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 39
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 325-6
Questions
Royal Ulster Constabulary 1073

Standard assessment tasks
Wales 33-4w

Standard Community Charge & Non-Domestic Rating (Definition of Domestic Property) (Amendment) Order 1991
Questions
142w

Standard spending assessments
379w
Census of population 272w
District councils 414w
Greenwich 272w
One parent families 273w
Population 378w

"Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1991"
136w

Stationery Office
see HMSO

Statistics
Child benefit 122w, 218w
One parent families 219w
Road traffic offences 287w

Statistics (Confidentiality) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:07:91) 778

Statute Law Revision (Isle of Man) Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Statutory Water Companies Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Debates etc.
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 355-7
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 323-4
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas aid 260w
National Union of Civil & Public Servants, Pay settlements 425w
New Parliamentary building, House of Commons accommodation 338w
Overseas aid, Construction 368w
South Africa, EC external relations 24-5w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Planning & Compensation Bill (HL) 1990/91, Commencement orders 278-9w
Planning Inspectorate, Conflict of interests 415w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Mental illness, Hospital beds 44-5w

Stern, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Severn Bridges Bill, Rem stages (02:07:91) 288-9
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 598, 601-2, 604, 610

Steroid drugs
Drug abuse 310w
Prosecutions 335w

Stevens, Mr Lewis
Debates etc.
Low incomes (09:07:91) 803-6
Questions
British Library, Construction 90w
Pensions Ombudsman 152w
Speed governors, Lorries 174w

Stevens Inquiry
see Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry

Stewart, Mr Allan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Steel industry (04:07:91) 467-8, 492, 497-502
Textile industry, Kilmarnock (03:07:91) 417-20
Questions
British Steel Corporation, Dalzell 375w
British Steel Corporation, Scotland 375w
Councillors, Working hours 127w
Councillors' allowances, Scotland 127w
Employment training, Scotland 473-4w
Fife Scottish Omnibuses, Privatisation 345w
Government grants to local authorities, Scotland 168-70w
Local enterprise companies, Forth Valley 513-4w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 129w
Local government finance, Scotland 129w, 171-2w
Local government revenue, Scotland 375w
Local government services, Contracts for services 127w
Regional development grants, Disclosure of information 344w
RENAVAL, Inverclyde 473w
Scottish Enterprise, Government grants 269-70w
Training, Contracts of employment 272w
Training, Disclosure of information 345-6w
Unemployment, Greenock 472w
Unemployment, Scotland 129w

Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 669
European Council (01:07:91) 36

Stobhill Hospital
(09:07:91) 924-30

Stockport
Training 348w

Stockport bypass
Road construction 286w

Stokes, Sir John
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 174

Stott, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1047-51
Questions
Community relations, Northern Ireland 1076-7

Strang, Mr Gavin
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 29-30
Questions
AIDS, Scotland 346w
Broadcasting 210w
Defence review, Defence industries 133w
HIV infection, Pregnant women 129-30w
Iraq, Overseas aid 428w

Strangford Lough
Public appointments 286w

Strategic programme for innovation & technology transfer
100w

STRIDE programme
Defence industries 100w

Student grants
Northern Ireland 235w
Project 2000 165w
Science & Engineering Research Council 303w

Student loans
Debts 43w

Student numbers
Engineering education 264w
Tower Hamlets 242w

Students
Republic of Ireland 164w

Submarines
157-8

Subsidiary companies
Company liquidations (09:07:91) 781-3

Subsistence allowances
127w

Sudan
Disaster relief 499w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
Banks, Points of order (10:07:91) 967
European Council (01:07:91) 40
Questions
British Rail 10w
Bury Borough Council, Bank of Credit & Commerce International 941
Business statements 1100
Minimum wage 349w

Summerson, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1245
Community charge (12:07:91) 1289-91
Housing (02:07:91) 211-2
Questions
Community charge, Waltham Forest 935-6
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Privatisation 20-1w

Sunday Entertainments (Video Supply) Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 621

Sunday trading
106w
Law enforcement 150w

Supplementary questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (04:07:91) 443, (09:07:91) 771

"Supply Estimates 1991/92"
(04:07:91) 460-536

"Supply Estimates 1991/92, Supplementary Estimates"
(04:07:91) 460-536

Surgery
Dental services 387w

Surveys
Bus services 15w
Dock workers 463-4w

Surveys—continued
Employment training 68w
Menopause 117w

Sutherland
House condition survey 346w
Housing finance 346w

Swansea
Defective housing 630-1
Housing 631
Public footpaths 508w

Syrian Arab Republic
Lockerbie 238w

Tai Cymru
see Housing for Wales

Takeovers
158w
ICI 299-300

Tanks
Defence procurement 479w
Repairs & maintenance 281w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 664

Tax administration
Next of kin 526w

Tax allowances
7w
Child care 299w
Fringe benefits 258w
Income tax 8w
Pension funds 365w
Tax yields 8w

Tax burden
Council tax 523w

Tax collection
176w
Community charge 273-4w, 936-7
VAT 526w

Tax rates & bands
Taxpayers 6w

Tax yields
Economic growth 525-6w
National insurance contributions 8-9w
PAYE 8-9w
Soft drinks 525w
Tax allowances 8w
Whisky 366w

Taxation
Building societies 256-8w, 525w, 1082-3
Horses 257w
Woolwich Building Society 88w, 297w, 425w

Taxis
Licensing 101w, 249-50w

Taxpayers
Personal income 5-9w
Tax rates & bands 6w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1218, 1229-38, 1256
Questions
HM Inspectorate of Pollution, Integrated pollution control 316w
Nature conservation, Offshore drilling 317-8w
Parrots, Import of live animals 371-2w
Petroleum exploration licences, Continental shelf 422w
School administration 42-4w
Schools, Manpower 42w
Schools, Wales 388w
Teachers, Wales 388-9w
Water pollution 381-2w
Water pollution, Waste disposal 382w
Water supply industry 939

Taylor, Mrs Ann—continued
Water treatment, EC law 313-4w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
European Council (01:07:91) 30
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 456-7
Low incomes (09:07:91) 816-8, 820
Questions
Community charge, Non-payment 181w
EC grants & loans, EC integration 308-9
NATO, Rapid deployment forces 149-50

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 982-92, 994
Questions
Anglo-Irish talks 301w, 475-6w
Defence review, Royal Irish Rangers 156
Flags, Newtownards 497w
Northern Ireland government 1069-70
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 376w
Public appointments, Strangford Lough 286w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 670-1
Questions
Small businesses, Truro 310-1

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Points of order (01:07:91) 120
Questions
Lockerbie, Disclosure of information 238w
Lockerbie, Syrian Arab Republic 238w
Yugoslavia, Independence movements 123w

Teacher training
English education 224w, 404-5w, 437w

Teachers
Early retirement 243w
London boroughs 243w
Wales 29-32w, 388-9w
Women 153w

Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Debates etc.
Community charge (12:07:91) 1291-2

Technical assistance
Bomb disposal 142-3w

Technical education
436

Teesside Development Corporation
937

Telecommunications industry
157w, 177w
Competition 315
Market Share 314-5
USA 314-5

Telecommunications technology
Nuclear submarines 492w

Telephone services
Compensation 19w

Telephone systems
322w
Identification of criminals 322-4w
Video equipment 323w

Telephone tapping
428

Telephones
Dept of the Environment 277w
Home Office 248w
Ministry of Defence 283w
Northern Ireland Office 500w
Scottish Office 271w
Treasury 257-8w

Telephones—continued
Welsh Office 264w

Television licences
422, 427
Computer privacy 321w

Temple-Morris, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland government (03:07:91) 323

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:07:91) 43

Tenant harassment
Antonelli, Samuel Thomas 277w

Tenants' choice
Kirklees Borough Council 946-7

Terminal care
Attendance allowance 151w

Territorial Army
(01:07:91) 43-119, 154-5
Armed forces recruitment 133w

Terrorism
Compensation 230-2w
Londonderry 230-2w
Northern Ireland 477-8w, 1071-3
Northern Ireland Railways 476w

Textile industry
East Midlands 315-6
Government assistance 316
Kilmarnock (03:07:91) 414-20
Redundancy 109w

Textiles
China 305

Thames Valley Police
Manpower 209w

Theatre
Amateur arts 15

Theft
Tower Hamlets Health Authority 455w

"This Common Inheritance White Paper"
938

Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Questions
Average earnings, Wales 191w
Baltic republics of USSR, Armed forces 205w
Iraq, Missing persons 23w
Pay, Wales 192w
Social security benefits, Wales 199w

Thomas Cook
Philippines 123-4w

Thompson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Badgers Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 579
Companies (Subsidiaries in Liquidation) Bill, 1R (09:07:91) 783
Hare Coursing Bill, Rep adjourned (05:07:91) 614
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 898-9, 909
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 602
Questions
Textiles, China 305

Thompson, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 237
Questions
Conditions of employment 763-4

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Questions
Community charge capping 942
Duromine, Drug side effects 410w
Piper Alpha Inquiry, Costs 152w
Special constables 431

Thorne, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 90-2
London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill, 2R (09:07:91) 835-7, 862-3

Thorne moors
RAMSAR Convention 417w

3D
Shareholders 56w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 750-2
Manchester Airport (10:07:91) 1062
Road Traffic Bill, Lords amendts (08:07:91) 679-81
Questions
Defence industries 147
North West Water Group, Pollution control 945
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 477-8w
Town & country planning 643

Thurrock Voice
181w

Time limits
Police custody 150w

Tobacco
Labelling 457w

Tornado aircraft
496w
Air targeting systems 239-40w
ALARM missiles 240w
RAF Leeming 399w

Torpoint
Armed forces married quarters 496w

Tourism
Urban development corporations 180w
Wales 629-30

Tower Hamlets
Alcoholism 407w
Community charge 315w
Council house rents 415w
Dogs 390w
Elderly 225w
Electorate 224w
Employment level 293w
Employment schemes 292w
Family credit 326w
Further education 242w
Health service staff 454-5w
Hospital closures 407w
Housing construction 92-4w, 415w
Income support 326w
Old people's homes 330w
Rate arrears 383w
School population 242w
Student numbers 242w
Unemployment 349w

Tower Hamlets Health Authority
454-5w
Family doctors 331w
Theft 455w

Town & country planning
643

Town & Country Planning (Fees for Applications & Deemed Applications) Regulations 1989
Questions
277w

Town & Country Planning General Development (Amendment) Order 1991
Questions
385-6w

Town & Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981
Questions
320w

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bypasses (08:07:91) 736, 744-7, 749

Townmead School West Drayton
Public petitions (05:07:91) 547

Townsend, Mr Cyril D
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1244-5
Questions
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 476w

Toxocara canis
181w

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Housing (02:07:91) 189-90, 196-7
Housing estates (10:07:91) 962

Trade & Industry Select Committee
(04:07:91) 460-536

Trade associations
Defence review 213w

Trade competitiveness
158w

Trade Descriptions (Animal Testing) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Trade fairs
Arms trade 283w

Trade marks
Law reform 98w

Trade Marks Act 1983
Questions
98w

Trade union officials
Training 201w

Trade unions
774, 776-7, 1084
Complaints 349w

Trades Union Congress
Educational finance 68-9w

Trading standards departments
Wales 31w

Training
462-4w
Armed forces discharges 484w, 488w
Avon 350w
Contracts of employment 272w
Disabled workers 295w
Disclosure of information 345-6w
EC grants & loans 350w
European Standing Committees 338w
Scotland 272w, 345-6w
Sheffield 347w
Stockport 348w
Trade union officials 201w
Urban development corporations 179-80w, 228w
Wales 637
Young people 764-5

Training allowances
Youth training 160-1

Training & enterprise councils
216w, 465-6w, 771
Electrical Contractors' Association 71-2w
Public appointments 447-8w
South West region 349w
Special training needs 772-3
Wales 447-8w
Youth training 765-6

Training & Enterprise Councils Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 619

Training Business Group
70w

Trans World Airlines
140w

Transplant surgery
Northern Ireland 1078

Transport
Safety measures 84w

Transport 2000
Conferences 13w

Transport of hazardous materials
Explosives 283w, 289w
Health & Safety Executive 293w

Transport of radioactive materials
Shipping accidents 291w
Uranium 15w

Trawsfynydd power station
Decommissioning 193w
Pollution monitoring 448w
Radiation hazards 192-4w
Water storage 193-4w

Treasury
Departmental records 300w
"Disability Manifesto" 156-7w
Environmental policy 156w
Opinion polls 526w
Telephones 257-8w

Treaties
353-4w
Mercenaries 22w
Prisoners' transfers 435w

Trespass
Avon (02:07:91) 291-8

Trident
134w

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 984, 1006, 1032-6
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Local authorities 944
Community relations, Northern Ireland 1076
Public contracts, EC countries 312
Public order offences, Northern Ireland 125w
Racial discrimination 200-1w

Trippier, Mr David, Minister for the Environment and Countryside
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1217-29, 1231-4, 1236, 1238, 1254, 1258, 1261, 1266, 1275, 1286, 1288
Questions
Beaches, Water pollution 380w
Countryside stewardship scheme 182w
Du Pont, Hazardous wastes 141w
Environmental policy 938
HM Inspectorate of Pollution, Integrated pollution control 316w
Industrial wastes, Polychlorinated biphenyl 56w
Litter, Local government functions 384w
Ministerial policy advisors, Poland 416w
National Rivers Authority 378w
Nature conservation, Offshore drilling 317-8w
Noise control 938-9
North West Water Group, Directors 945
North West Water Group, Pollution control 945
Pentachlorophenol, Pollution monitoring 57-8w
Pollution control, Mersey Basin 944-5
Radioactive waste disposal 950
South West Water 939
Toxocara canis 181w
UN Environment Programme 416w
Venezuela, Official visits 414w
Waste management, Departmental publications 55w
Water pollution 379w, 381-2w
Water pollution, Waste disposal 382w
Water supply industry 939
Water treatment, EC law 313-4w

Trotter, Mr Neville
Questions
Kuwait, British residents abroad 253w
Navy, Shipbuilding 158

Truancy
163-4, 440-1w

Truro
Small businesses 310-1

Trust funds
Health authorities 225w

Tumin Inquiry
see Brixton Prison Escapes Inquiry

Turkey
Refugees 153

Turner Committee
see Building Regulations Advisory Committee

Twinn, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 176
Questions
Conservative Party, Northern Ireland government 477w

Twins towns
1075-6

Tyne & Wear
Derelict land 937-8

Tyne & Wear Development Corporation
277w

UK contributions
Natural Environment Research Council 450w

UK delegations
Council of Europe 110w
Western European Union 110w

UK trade with EC
305

Ulster Defence Regiment
1071-2

UN Environment Programme
416w

UN Secretariat
520w
Official visits 238w

UN Special Commission on Iraq
124-5w

Unemployed
Per capita costs 363-4w

Unemployment
438, 768-9
Congleton 294w
EC countries 768
EC Social Charter 761
Estimates days (03:07:91) 343-413
Greenock 472w
Leyton 348w
Men 389w
Northern Ireland 1074, 1079
Nurses' training 46-7w
Port Glasgow 472w
Scotland 129w
South Wales 32-3w
Tower Hamlets 349w
Wales 32-3w, 261w, 637

Unemployment benefits
Civil service manpower 71w
Social security claims 71w

UNESCO
450w

Unfair competition
Egypt 254-5w

Uniform business rate
Greater London 179w
Hotels 297-8w, 383w

Uniform business rate—continued
Non-payment 206w, 933
Sports facilities 524w

Unit Trust Association
Investment trusts 325w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Wave power 37w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (Limit on Borrowing) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(03:07:91) 339

United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service
(02:07:91) 165-78, 216w
Government grants 321-2w
Legal advice & assistance 322w

United Kingdom NIREX
950

United Kingdom Passport Agency
390w

United Kingdom Warning & Monitoring Organisation
391-4w

United Nations
(01:07:91) 21-41, 416w, 520w
Alternative energy 450w

Universities' Funding Council
41-2w, 153w

University finance
Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals 110w
Medical education 437w

University teachers
Pay 437w

Upper Waiting Hall
Kenya Wildlife Trust 498w

Uranium
Transport of radioactive materials 15w

Urban development corporations
181w, 937
Housing finance 180w, 228w
Housing stock 180-1w, 228w
Tourism 180w
Training 179-80w, 228w
Wales 228w

Urban programme
Expenditure 57w

US bases
Air force bases 134-5w
Holy Loch 245w

USA
Armed forces deployment 520w
China 310w
Foreign investment in UK 301
Foreign policy 219w
Minimum wage 770
Ministers' visits abroad 313w, 508w
Telecommunications industry 314-5

USSR
CFE Treaty 419w
Emigration 215w
Nuclear weapons 134w
Shipbuilding 213w

Vacant land
Defence land 134w

Vaccination
Hepatitis 118w

Vagrancy (Amendment) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 620

Vale of Glamorgan railway
1-2

Valleys initiative
32-3w

Valuation officers
142w

VAT
Income 176w
Sports 1074-5
Tax collection 526w

Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Debates etc.
Medical Qualifications (Amendment) Bill, 2R & rem stages * (05:07:91) 620
Questions
House of Commons passes 211w
LINK programme, Expenditure 96-7w
Science & technology research, Expenditure 41-2w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 665
Political refugees (02:07:91) 173
Questions
AIDS, Pregnant women 507w
Business statements 1090-1
City Challenge 181-2w
False imprisonment, Compensation 4w, 101w
Footwear industry, East Midlands 315-6
HIV infection, Screening 506-7w
Multifibre arrangement, Redundancy 20w
Naturalisation, Administrative delays 429-30
Passports, Administrative delays 105w
Textile industry, Redundancy 109w

Venezuela
Official visits 414w

Veterans Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Veterinary Investigation Service
183-6w, 372w
Construction 74w
Lincoln 73w
Salmonella 74w

Veterinary medicine
Animal welfare 153w

Vickers Defence Systems
Defence contracts 479w

Video equipment
Telephone systems 323w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
Community charge, Armed forces 377w

Vocational guidance
Armed forces discharges 484w
Scotland 343w, 347w, 374w

Voluntary organisations
Agriculture 444w
Local government expenditure 417-9w

Voluntary schools
439w
Barnet 303-4w
Capital investment 177w

Wakefield prison
425

***Wakeham, Rt Hon John**, Secretary of State for Energy*
Debates etc.
Power industry (02:07:91) 235-42
Questions
EC Energy Council 423w
Electricity supply industry, Consumer protection 37w
Electricity supply industry, Pay 86w
Nuclear Electric, Pay 422-3w
Opinion polls, Dept of Energy 424w
Publicity, Dept of Energy 39w, 423-4w

***Waldegrave, Rt Hon William**, Secretary of State for Health*
Questions
Clinical Standards Advisory Group 186-7w
Hospital waiting lists 505w

***Waldegrave, Rt Hon William**—continued*
Medical education, Expenditure 187-8w
Medicines Control Agency, Civil service agencies 409w
NHS complaints 334w
NHS trusts, Disclosure of information 332-3w
NHS trusts, Information 330w
NHS trusts, Manpower 188w
Regional health authorities, Finance 336w
Tobacco, Labelling 457w

Walden, Mr George
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 457
Questions
Aggregates, Mining 220-1w
Educational institutions, Government contracts 405w
English education, Teacher training 224w, 404-5w, 437w
Teachers, Women 153w

Wales
Arts finance 5w
Average earnings 191w
Blue ear pig disease 190w
British Dental Association 387w
Childbirth 190w
Cost per pupil 262w
Council house sales 508-10w
Craft industries 31-2w
Dental health 385-7w
Dental services 312w, 385-7w
Economic recession 637-8
Employment Action 34w
Employment level 312-3w
Employment opportunities 262w, 773
Employment schemes 263-4w
Employment training 101w, 147w, 191-2w
Fluoridation 386-7w
Foreign investment in UK 639-40
Further education 630
Hazardous wastes 444w
Health services 261w
Heart diseases 262w
HIV infection 229w
Homelessness 445-6w
Hospital closures 230w
Hospital waiting lists 633
Housing construction 446w
ICI 254w
Livestock 147w, 190w
Local government 639
Local government expenditure 34w, 361-4w
Local government reform 263w
Local government revenue 34w
Low flying 79-80w
Minimum wage 637
NHS 632-3
NHS administration 146w
NHS trusts 640
Nursing homes 263w
Pay 192w
Physical education 146w
Planning appeals 34-6w
Playing fields 388w
Pre-School Playgroups' Association 311-2w
Rural areas 634-5
School buildings 386w
School meals 444-5w
Schools 147w, 388w
Set-aside schemes 446w
Social security benefits 199w
Special education 630
Special training needs 229-30w
Sports facilities 146w
Standard assessment tasks 33-4w
Teachers 29-32w, 388-9w
Tourism 629-30
Trading standards departments 31w
Training 637
Training & enterprise councils 447-8w
Unemployment 32-3w, 261w, 637
Urban development corporations 228w
Waste disposal 636

Wales Tourist Board
Advertising 629

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, 1R (02:07:91) 182
Questions
AIDS in Scotland Task Force 271w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 193-4

Walker, Mr A Cecil
Debates etc.
Appropriation (No 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (10:07:91) 1009, 1040-2

Wallace, Colin
478w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 906-9
Unemployment (03:07:91) 389-93
Questions
Business statements 441-2, 1087-8
Dredging, Environment protection 56-7w
Dredging, Nature conservation 76w
Dredging, River Thames 76w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Scotland 271-2w
Low flying, Complaints 133w
Mental illness specific grant, Scotland 235-6w

Wallace, William
Cultural heritage 67w

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1122
Questions
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 12

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Dock workers, Surveys 463-4w
Ferries 85w
Ferries, Shipping safety 84-6w
Motor vehicles, Energy conservation 16w
Shipping accidents 9, 85w, 353w
Shipping safety, Inspections 291-2w
Ships, Safety standards 291w

Waltham Forest
Community charge 935-6

War Pensioners' Welfare Service
64w

War pensions
Asbestosis 65w
Exservicemen 150-1w

War pensions committees
63-4w

Ward, Mr John
Debates etc.
Rights of Access to Neighbouring Land Bill, 1R (03:07:91) 338
Questions
Goods vehicles, Axle weights 174-5w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 513, 528-31
Questions
British Dental Association, Wales 387w
Cardiff Airport 509-10w
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education, Social workers' training 497-8w
Dental health, Health education 330w
Dental health, Research finance 386w
Dental health, Schools 385w
Dental health, Wales 385w, 387w
Dental services, Ministers' domestic visits 448w
Dental services, Schools 385-6w
Dental services, Surgery 387w
Fluoridation, Wales 386-7w
HIV infection, Dentists 388w
HIV infection, Wales 229w

Wardell, Mr Gareth—continued
Nursing homes, Health services 263w
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff 632
Public footpaths, Swansea 508w
School milk 330w
Sewage, Odour pollution 220w

Wardle, Mr Charles
Questions
Economic recession 303

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Questions
Urban development corporations 937

Warnings
Floods 172w

Warranties
Housing construction 522w

Warren, Mr Kenneth
Questions
Defence review, Defence industries 212w
Defence review, Trade associations 213w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 950

Warrington Health Authority
46w
Per capita costs 45-6w

Warsaw Pact
(01:07:91) 43-119

Warships
157-8
Amphibious vehicles 214w
Shipbuilding 495w
South Atlantic 282w

Waste disposal
222w
Livestock 147w, 190w
Wales 636
Water pollution 382w

Waste management
Departmental publications 55w

Water companies
Pay 434

Water Consolidation (Consequential Provisions) Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Water Industry Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Water pollution
379w, 381-3w
Beaches 380w
Inland waterways 95w
Nitrates 524w
Waste disposal 382w

Water Resources Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (12:07:91) 1286

Water storage
Trawsfynydd power station 193-4w

Water supply industry
939
Income 524w

Water transport
River Thames 308w

Water treatment
EC law 313-4w
Nuclear reactors 525w

Watney Truman
Notices to quit 311w

Watson, Mr Mike
Questions
Foreign aid, EC countries 259w

Watts, Mr John
Debates etc.
Political refugees (02:07:91) 178

Wave power
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 37w

Welfare of Calves (Export) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 617

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 457
Questions
Telecommunications industry, Competition 315

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 71-2
Questions
Business statements 1090
Channel Three, Broadcasting licences 206w

Welsh Affairs Select Committee
(04:07:91) 460-536

Welsh Assembly
638-9

Welsh Development Agency
Development Board for Rural Wales 31w

Welsh Office
388w
"Disability Manifesto" 449-50w
Publicity 35-6w, 388w, 447w
Rural areas 27-8w
Telephones 264w

West Indian immigrants
210w

West Midlands
Car industry 306
Crime prevention panels 433w
Manufacturing industries 305-6

West Midlands Police
Inquiries 207w

West Wales
Health services 261w

West Yorkshire
Housing association grant 141-2w
Police 206w
Railway electrification 11-2

Western European Union
149-50
UK delegations 110w

Weston-super-Mare
Road construction 498w

Wheelchairs
409w

Wheeler, Sir John
Debates etc.
Commonhold (12:07:91) 1242
European Council (01:07:91) 33
Hong Kong (04:07:91) 457
Political refugees (02:07:91) 171
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 653
Questions
Civil defence 391-4w
Commemorative coins 156w
Prison staff 426

Whisky
EC internal trade 366w
Exports 373w
Tax yields 366w

Whitbread
Notices to quit 19w

Whitby
Red Arrows 400w

White-collar workers
Jobclubs 762-3

Whitehall
Flags 316w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Asbestosis, War pensions 65w
Child benefit, Statistics 122w
Civil service agencies, Annual reports 397w
Civil service agencies, Performance indicators 397w
Civil service manpower, Dept of Social Security 327-8w
Community charge benefits 181w
Computer applications, Dept of Social Security local offices 458-60w
Day care of children, Dept of Social Security 328w
Dept of Social Security, Departmental publications 122w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Johnstone 197-200w
Higher civil servants, Dept of Social Security 460w
Housing benefits, Local government expenditure 326-7w, 394-6w
Income support, Mortgages 328w
Income support, Residential care 217-8w, 246w
Income support, Tower Hamlets 326w
Opinion polls, Dept of Social Security 461w
Pay incentives, Information Technology Services Agency 459w
Personal pensions 461-2w
Plansworth Resettlement Unit 460w
Publicity, Dept of Social Security 66w, 459-61w
Rent rebates, Local government expenditure 395w
Residential care, Hospital discharges 327-8w
Severe disability premium, Social security appeals 121w
Social security appeals 65w
Social security benefits, Wales 199w
Social security benefits rates, Young people 67w
Social security benefits reductions, Hospital patients 122w
Social security benefits reductions, Newcastle upon Tyne 399w
Social security payments 121w
Social security payments, Bank services 152w
War Pensioners' Welfare Service 64w
War pensions, Exservicemen 150-1w
War pensions committees 63-4w
Widows' benefits, Take-up 65w
Working hours, Dept of Social Security 327w

Widows' benefits
Take-up 65w

Wiggin, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 555-6, 558
Questions
Business statements 445
Helicopters, Defence procurement 479-80w
Road construction, Weston-super-Mare 498w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Questions
Africa, Disaster relief 520w
Africa, Food aid from UK 499w
Ativan, Prescriptions 189w
Ethiopia, Food aid 498-9w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 633
Mozambique, Food aid 499w
Sudan, Disaster relief 499w
Welsh Assembly 638

Wild geese
Islay 342-3w
Pest control 342-3w

Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (05:07:91) 548-65

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 108
European Council (01:07:91) 41
Questions
Defence review, Air force 137-8w
HMS Endurance, Falkland Islands 151

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (08:07:91) 672
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 655
Questions
Council house sales, Wales 508-10w
Housing, Swansea 631
Severn bridge, Interest charges 309w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Environment (12:07:91) 1222, 1249, 1258, 1266-70
Oral question time intervention (08:07:91) 647-8
Questions
Explosives, Transport of hazardous materials 283w
NHS trusts, Wales 640
Transport of hazardous materials, Explosives 289w

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Members' facilities, Computers (08:07:91) 714-8
Questions
Business statements 1098-9
Government grants to voluntary organisations 47-51w
Kenya Wildlife Trust, Upper Waiting Hall 498w
Waste disposal 222w

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
House of Commons times of sittings (09:07:91) 908, 911
Low incomes (09:07:91) 792
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 595-9
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 1083-4
Departmental records 1w
Land ownership & tenure, Scotland 343w
Poetry, "Aquarius" 16
Public records 9w
Public records, Disclosure of information 9w
Public relations, Civil service manpower 19-20
Tax allowances, Child care 299w
Treasury, Departmental records 300w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 46-7, 54, 60
European Council (01:07:91) 29
Housing (02:07:91) 192, 195-6
Housing estates (10:07:91) 964
Iraq, Refugees (03:07:91) 344
Le Pen, Jean-Marie, Points of order (02:07:91) 182, (03:07:91) 337
Low incomes (09:07:91) 789, 797
Political refugees (02:07:91) 177-8
Prison escapes, Brixton Prison (08:07:91) 657
Questions
Armed forces casualties, Aids for handicapped 81w
Armed forces casualties, Armed forces training 81w, 518w
British National Party, Racial incitement 173w

Winnick, Mr David—continued
Business statements 442, 1098
Conservative Party 777
Hicks, Adrian, Armed forces pensions 81w
Le Pen, Jean Marie 424
Northern Ireland government 476w
Public sector housing 940-1

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Abortion, Scotland 130w
Criminal records, Computer applications 249-50w
Employment level, Congleton 294w
Unemployment, Congleton 294w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 503-8, 527, 535
Oral question time point of order (03:07:91) 318
Questions
HMS Endurance, Shipbuilding 282w
Inflation 307-8
Warships, South Atlantic 282w

Wise, Mrs Audrey
Debates etc.
Hospital waiting lists (04:07:91) 509-12
Questions
Bilateral aid 368-9w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 280w
Tax administration, Next of kin 526w

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 73
British Railways Board (Finance) Bill, 2R & Money res (11:07:91) 1114, 1158
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 10-1

Wolverhampton
City Challenge 933-4

Women
Crime victims 208-9w
Crimes of violence 152w
Prisoners 215w
Teachers 153w

Women's Aid Federation (England)
150w

Women's employment
EC Social Charter 159

Women's National Commission
215w

Wood, Mr Timothy, an Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
Unemployment (03:07:91) 406

Woodland grant scheme
Caledonian Forest 344w

Woolwich Building Society
Taxation 88w, 297w, 425w

Working hours
Civil service agencies 257w, 327w
Councillors 127w
Customs & Excise 257w
Dept of Social Security 327w
EC law 154w

World Bank
Annual reports 428w

World Conservation Monitoring Centre
450-1w

World Heritage Convention
(10:07:91) 968-70

Worthington, Mr Tony
Questions
Training, Contracts of employment 272w

Wray, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Child benefit 246w
Child care, EC action 506w
Clinical wastes, Ipfectious diseases 470w

Wray, Mr Jimmy—continued
Clinical wastes, Scotland 374w, 469-70w
Disabled workers, Training 295w
Nicaragua, Bilateral aid 260w
Nitrates, Water pollution 524w
Play groups, Fees & charges 475w

WS Atkins & Partners
242w

Wyre Forest
Civil defence 249w
Defence land 136w

"Yearbook on Arms Control & Environmental Agreements (Verification Report)"
23-4w

Yeo, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment
Debates etc.
Amusement arcades, Planning permission (01:07:91) 143-6
Housing (02:07:91) 220-2
Smoke Detectors Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 603-4, 610-1
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (05:07:91) 561-5
Questions
Aggregates 319-20w
Aggregates, Mining 220-1w
Antonelli, Samuel Thomas, Tenant harassment 277w
Bass, Government assistance 279w
Council housing 381w
Disabled facilities grants 275-6w
Disabled facilities grants, Council tenants 275w
Disabled facilities grants, Expenditure 276w
Dredging, Environment protection 56-7w
Empty property, London boroughs 316-8w
Estate Action, Hackney 314w
Flags, Whitehall 316w
"Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England & Wales" 58w
Homelessness, London boroughs 317w
Housing & handicapped, Carers 276w
Housing & handicapped, Housing construction 276w
Housing & handicapped, Housing improvement 276w
Housing association grant, West Yorkshire 141-2w
Housing associations, Expenditure 946-7
Housing construction, Leicester 384w
Housing construction, Tower Hamlets 92-4w
Palace of Westminster, Procurement 274w
Planning Inspectorate, Conflict of interests 415w
Planning Inspectorate, Recruitment 384-5w
Planning permission 414w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 414w
Planning permission, Fees & charges 277w
Public sector housing, Housing construction 379w
Right to buy, Commonhold 414-5w
Satellite broadcasting, Planning permission 385-6w
Sheltered housing, Leasehold housing 93w
South Park School Lincoln, Planning permission 94w
Town & Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 320w

Yorkshire & Humberside
Insolvency Service 18w, 255-6w

Yorkshire Electricity Board
773

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
Abortion 52-3w

Yorkshire Water
Fluoridation 412w

Young, Mr David
Questions
Gibraltar, EC action 205w

***Young, Sir George**, Minister for Housing and Planning*
Debates etc.
Commonhold, Ministerial statements (12:07:91) 1237-46
Council housing, Ministerial statements (10:07:91) 956-64
Housing (02:07:91) 190-1, 194-201
Questions
Bury Borough Council, Bank of Credit & Commerce International 941
Council house rents, Tower Hamlets 415w
Council housing, Homelessness 941
Derelict land, Northumberland 937-8
Homelessness, Leasehold housing 381w
Housing construction, Tower Hamlets 415w
Planning & Compensation Bill (HL) 1990/91, Commencement orders 278-9w
Public sector housing 940-1
Rents to mortgages scheme 378w

Young offenders
423
Crime prevention panels 206w, 433w
Parental responsibility 423
Secure accommodation 423-4

Young people
Handicapped 453-4w
Social security benefits rates 67w
Training 764-5

Young Persons (Alcohol Abuse) Etc Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (05:07:91) 616

Younger, Rt Hon George
Debates etc.
Army (01:07:91) 70-4

Youth training
272w, 292w, 465-6w, 764-6, 771, 1082-3
Bridging allowances 466w
Contracts 294w

Youth training*—*continued
Lancashire 108w
Refugees 463w
St Ives 765
Training allowances 160-1
Training & enterprise councils 765-6

Youth unemployment
South London 1082

Ypsi Belmont
312w

Yugoslavia
EC external relations 218-9w
Independence movements 123w
Ministerial statements (03:07:91) 328-35
Self-determination of states 521w

Zhengjiang, Bishop
419w

Zimbabwe
Ministers' visits abroad 259-60w
Overseas aid 644